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The First Workers' Government in History: Karl Marx's Addenda to Lissagaray's *History of the Commune of 1871*

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Abstract

In Marxist circles it is common to refer to Karl Marx's *The Civil War in France* for a theoretical analysis of the historical significance of the Paris Commune, and to Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray's *History of the Commune of 1871* for a description of the facts surrounding the insurrection of the Paris workers and its repression by the National Assembly led by Adolphe Thiers. What is less well-known is that Marx himself oversaw the German translation of Lissagaray's book and made numerous additions to it. In this article we describe Marx's addenda to Lissagaray's work, showing how they contribute to concretising his analysis of the Paris Commune and how they relate to the split in the International Working Men's Association between Marxists and anarchists that took place after the Commune's defeat. We also show how Marx's additions to the German version of Lissagaray's book were linked to his involvement with the recently created Socialist Workers' Party of Germany and to his criticism of the programme it had adopted at the congress celebrated in the city of Gotha.

Keywords

Paris Commune – Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray – Karl Marx – Workers' Party – Workers' Government

Introduction

In Marxist circles it is common to refer to Karl Marx's *The Civil War in France: Address of the General Council of the International Working-Men's Association*

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for a theoretical analysis of the historical significance of the Paris Commune, and to Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray's *History of the Commune of 1871* for a description of the facts surrounding the insurrection of the Paris workers and its repression by the National Assembly led by Adolphe Thiers. What is less well-known is that Marx himself oversaw the German translation of Lissagaray's book and made numerous additions to it. According to a note inserted in the tenth volume of Marx and Engels's *Collected Works*:

> Marx became actively involved in the commissioning of a German translation of a book written by one of its members, Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray, *Histoire de la Commune de 1871*. He requested Wilhelm Bracke, and Engels asked Wilhelm Blos to find somebody to do the job. The sample translation done by Julius Grunzig failed to satisfy Marx, as did that by Isolde Kurz. Although Marx was already overburdened with work, he had to spend a great deal of time and effort editing the translation. In the autumn of 1877, on Marx's and Engels' proposal, Wilhelm Blos was recruited as another editor. Lissagaray's book appeared in German in Brunswick late in 1877.[1]

The German translation of Lissagaray's *Histoire de la Commune de 1871* occupied Marx for almost a year, from October 1876 to August 1877. Lissagaray's book was translated into English by Eleanor Marx, one of Marx's daughters, who in her introduction, written in 1886, said: 'I am loath to alter the work in any way. It had been entirely revised and corrected by my father. I want it to remain as he knew it.'[2] In this essay we will contrast the first French edition of Lissagaray's book, published in 1876, with the German version of 1877, in order to bring out the most substantial paragraphs added by Marx.[3] Some of Marx's additions were translated by Eleanor Marx for the English version; we will reproduce her English rendering whenever possible, otherwise offering our own version of the untranslated German addenda.

1 Marx and Engels 1983a, p. 480.

2 Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray, *History of the Commune of 1871*, translated from the French by Eleanor Marx Aveling, New York: International Publishing, 1886, p. v. Henceforth cited as Lissagaray 1886.

3 We cannot reproduce and contextualise *all* of Marx's addenda (some of which deal with circumstantial events) without going beyond the customary length of an academic essay. For the elaboration of the present essay we have compiled the complete list of Marx's additions in German, which we will be happy to supply to anyone interested in this matter. Requests can be sent to <danielgaid@gmail.com>.

Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray and the Marx Family

Hippolyte Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray (1838–1901) was, during the period covered by this article, a republican journalist during the Second French Empire, a *communard*, an exile in London, one of the first historians of the Paris Commune and, last but not least, a member of the Marx household, both by virtue of his personal acquaintance with Karl Marx and of his liaison with Eleanor Marx.

Lissagaray was born in Toulouse. He received a classical education and after finishing his studies made a trip to the United States of America; then, in 1860, he moved to Paris, where he ran a literary society and founded an ephemeral *Revue des cours littéraires*. A republican opponent of the Second French Empire of Louis Napoléon, in August 1868 he founded the newspaper *L'Avenir* in Auch, a small commune in the *département* of Gers in southern France, where he demanded democratic rights such as 'the right of assembly and association, freedom of the press, speech and conscience, municipal independence and decentralisation, fair and secret elections, effective accountability of representatives and state officials, separation between church and state, free and compulsory education' and 'the abolition of standing armies'.[4]

Lissagaray was fined and imprisoned repeatedly for his political views. After moving to Paris, he collaborated with the journal *La Réforme politique et sociale* of Aimé Malespine, from October to November 1869, and in December 1869 he founded the newspaper *La Marseillaise* with Henri Rochefort. After being imprisoned repeatedly for his republican views, on 10 May 1870 he went into exile for three months in Brussels.

With the collapse of the Second Empire and the proclamation of the third French republic on 4 September 1870, Lissagaray placed himself at the disposal of Léon Gambetta, the Minister of the Interior of the Government of National Defence, who appointed him war commissar in Toulouse. On 10 January 1871, he was in General Chanzy's army as squadron commander when the armistice was signed.

When the Commune was proclaimed on 18 March 1871, Lissagaray immediately returned to Paris, not as an official or employee of the Commune but exclusively as a militant and journalist, publishing six issues of the newspaper *L'Action* (4–9 April) and eight issues of *Le tribun du peuple* (17–24 May). He then took part, from 25 to 28 May, in the street battles of the Bloody Week, first on the barricades of the 11th *arrondissement* (district) and then in Belleville.

4 Bidouze 1991, p. 34.

Two years later, a military court sentenced him *in absentia* to deportation and confinement in a fortress. From 1871 to 1880 he lived in exile.[5]

Having managed to escape to Belgium, Lissagaray published in Brussels his first work on the Paris Commune, called *Les Huit Journées de mai derrière les barricades*.[6] Marx's wife, Jenny, reported in December 1871 to Dr Louis Kugelmann that, 'With one exception, all the books on the Commune that have appeared so far are worth nothing. This unique exception to the general rule is Lissagaray's work, which you will receive along with this letter.'[7] He also published in Brussels a 31-page-long pamphlet entitled *Vision de Versailles*.[8]

From Belgium, Lissagaray left for England, where he met the Marx family, including Eleanor, whose fiancée he eventually became, but whom he never married, due to her parents' disproval. Between October and November 1874, he published three issues of a magazine entitled *Rouge et Noir*, where his use of class terminology shows Marx's influence on a writer who had until then been nothing more than a democratic republican.

Thus, in Nº 1 of *Rouge et Noir*, published on 24 October 1874, Lissagaray described Thiers as the political leader who 'represented the bourgeoisie of his century'. As for 'the gentle Jules Simon', who had 'recently lamented the weakness of the Republicans', Lissagaray argued that it was hard to take seriously the statements of 'this poor dear man, who ordered the shooting of thirty-five thousand people'. A torrent of blood separated the bourgeoisie from the masses: 'For thirty years, the first thing the republican bourgeoisie has done when coming to power is to shoot as many workers as possible. Then it exclaims, "It's amazing how rare Republicans are!"'

In Nº 2 of *Rouge et Noir*, published on 20 November 1874, Lissagaray told 'a few home truths' to the '*bon bourgeois*', who complained: 'It is the Empire that has lost us! The Empire that corrupted us for twenty years!' Actually, Lissagaray argued, the bourgeoisie had supported the Empire until the last moment, and people like Adolphe Thiers showed that 'the politicians of the bourgeoisie never die in France'; at most they could 'wither for a moment like tender flowers', only to reappear at the first sign of a popular movement, in order to derail and strangle it.[9]

In the third and final number of *Rouge et Noir*, published on 27 November 1874, Lissagaray returned to this idea, arguing that

5 Kapp 1972, p. 157.

6 Lissagaray 1871.

7 'Lettre de Jenny Marx à Kugelmann, Londres, 21 décembre 1871', in Marx, Marx and Engels 1971, p. 212.

8 Lissagaray 1873.

9 Bidouze 1991, pp. 126–7.

> since the beginning of the century, the French people have been reproducing the same history [....] They rise up: the bourgeoisie crushes them; then it is saddled [by a Bonaparte]. The rider remains in the saddle sixteen or seventeen years on average. The people start again, the bourgeoisie once again does same: another stableman [*palefrenier*] appears.[10]

As an exile, Lissagaray lived in poverty, organised conferences, collaborated with several newspapers and in 1876, after a long period of research, published the book *Histoire de la Commune de 1871*, edited in Brussels but banned and clandestinely distributed in France.[11] Eleanor Marx gave to Lissagaray as much assistance as she could in the preparation of his work. In July 1876 Eleanor wrote two letters to Karl Hirsch (1841–1900), a German Socialist who had fled to Paris due to Bismarck's persecutions, asking him to trace material needed for Lissagaray's book in the June 1872 files of the journals *Le Radical* and in *Le Droit*. On 20 October she announced that the *Histoire de la Commune de 1871* was due to come out at the end of the following month, and on 25 November 1876 she told Hirsch to expect a visit from its publisher, Henri Kistemaecker, to arrange for the book's distribution in Paris.[12]

Karl Marx had the highest regard for Lissagaray's book. It was, Marx emphasised in a letter written on 23 September 1876 to Wilhelm Bracke, a socialist publisher in Brunswick, 'the first *authentic* history of the Commune. Not only has Lissagaray made use of all the published sources – he is also in possession of the material inaccessible to all others, quite apart from his having witnessed with his own eyes most of the events he depicts.' As such, it could not be matched by any other book on the subject and its translation had to be impeccable. Since a certain Julius Grunzig in Berlin had volunteered to bring out a German edition, Marx offered to send him 'some sample sheets to translate in order to assure myself of his competence'. However, Grunzig could not be considered as publisher: 'I would suggest that you undertake to bring out this work, which is of importance to our party and of interest to the German reading public at large', Marx urged Bracke.[13] Bracke accepted Marx's proposal, and throughout the autumn of 1876 and most of the following year, Marx took upon himself the entire burden of revising – and indeed expanding upon – the German version of the *Histoire de la Commune de 1871*. According to the biographer of Eleanor Marx, Yvonne Kapp, Marx 'had laboured for months on the

10 Bidouze 1991, p. 128.
11 Lissagaray 1876.
12 Kapp 1972, p. 158.
13 Marx 1876, pp. 149–50; emphasis in the original.

French edition of *Capital*, but never had he taken more pains over any work other than his own to ensure that a translation should be treated with so much respect as he claimed for Lissagaray'.[14]

The German edition of the Lissagaray's book, published by Bracke, finally appeared in late 1877,[15] while the publication of the English translation by Eleanor Marx of *The History of the Commune of 1871* only took place in 1886.[16] Meanwhile, on 11 July 1880, the French Parliament voted an amnesty for the *communards*, and Lissagaray, after Eleanor broke off her engagement to him, returned to Paris, where he resumed his journalistic and publicistic activities and in 1896 published a revised edition of the *Histoire de la Commune de 1871*.[17]

The second edition of the *Histoire de la Commune de 1871*, published twenty years after the first one, included an additional thirty-seventh chapter whose sub-titles are: 'The Assembly of Misfortune' (a reference to the National Assembly that ruled France for five years, from 12 February 1871 to 7 March 1876), 'The Mac-Mahonnat' (a reference to the tenure of Patrice de MacMahon as President of France, from 24 May 1873 to 30 January 1879), and '*Le Grand retour*', referring to the return of the deportees and exiles after the law granting them full amnesty was approved by the French parliament on 11 July 1880, which allowed Lissagaray to return to France. This edition also included a substantial 'Prologue', a list of 'works on the Commune published by the condemned of the War Councils', as well as 24 new documents added to the appendix.

The historian of the Commune Jacques Rougerie argued that 'Lissagaray was only briefly, superficially oriented by Marx towards an anti-state interpretation of 1871', and that 'in the "definitive" edition of 1896 Lissagaray simply got rid of these Marxian additions'.[18] But the preface to this second edition, titled 'So we know [*Pour qu'on sache*]' ends with this overview of the century that was just ending:

> The gradual, irresistible advent of the working classes [*classes laborieuses*] is the most important fact of the nineteenth century. In 1830, in 1848, in 1870, the people occupied the *Hôtel-de-Ville* to cede it almost immediately to the stealers [*subtiliseurs*] of victories; in 1871, they remained there, refused to surrender it, and, for more than two months, administered, governed, led the city into battle. How, by whom the people were

14 Kapp 1972, pp. 177–8.
15 Lissagaray 1877.
16 Lissagaray 1886.
17 Lissagaray 1896.
18 Rougerie 2009, p. 326.

> again brought down, they must know; they can hear it and be patient with the truth, because the people are immortal.[19]

And in an afterword entitled '1896' Lissagaray wrote: 'Three times the French proletariat made the Republic for others; it is ripe for its own.'[20]

According to Robert Tombs, 'Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray's *Histoire de la Commune*, published in Brussels in 1876, in an English translation by Eleanor Marx in 1886, and in France in 1896 … is still after more than a century arguably the best general history of the Commune'.[21]

The Second French Empire (1852–70) and the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1)

In the Prologue, Lissagaray pointed out that the history of the Commune was 'due to their children, to all the workingmen of the earth', and that 'the child has the right to know the reason of the paternal defeats, the Socialist party the campaign of its flag in all countries', which Marx added in to the German Preface dated 'London, April 1877': 'The Commune of 1871 was just a prelude. In the battles of the (Second French) Empire, the great social struggles announce themselves. If the fighters of tomorrow do not know yesterday's battles thoroughly, the same bloodbath awaits them. In such circumstances, flattery is tantamount to betrayal.'[22]

The Prologue includes in the French original a paragraph which argues that 'the bourgeoisie accepted the Second Empire from fear of Socialism, even as their fathers had submitted to the first [1804–14] to put an end to the Revolution.' Marx then added four paragraphs to the German version, which in his daughter's rendering read:

> But he [Napoléon] left the same bourgeoisie saddled for all masters. When they possessed themselves of the parliamentary government, to which Mirabeau wished to raise them at one bound, they were incapable

19 Lissagaray 1896, p. III.

20 Lissagaray 1896, p. 132.

21 Tombs 1999, p. 203. For a recent overview of the Paris Commune, see Tombs 2014; for a collection of essays by contemporary historians of the Commune, see Godineau and César (eds.) 2019; for a Marxist analysis, see Gluckstein 2006.

22 Lissagaray 1886, p. 4; Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray, *Geschichte der Commune von 1871. Autorisirte deutsche Ausgabe nach dem vom Verfasser vervollständigten französischen Original*. Braunschweig: Bracke, Jr., 1877, pp. 3–4. Henceforth cited as Lissagaray 1877.

of governing. Their mutiny of 1830, turned into a revolution by the people, made the belly master.[23] The great bourgeois of 1830, like him of 1790, had but one thought – to gorge himself with privileges, to arm the bulwarks in defence of his domains, to perpetuate the proletariat. The fortune of his country is nothing to him, so that he fatten. To lead, to compromise France, the parliamentary king [Louis Philippe I] has as free license as Bonaparte. When by a new outburst of the people the bourgeoisie are compelled to seize the helm [during the revolution of February 1848], after three years, in spite of massacre and proscription,[24] it slips out of their palsied hands into those of the first comer [Louis Napoléon Bonaparte].

From 1851 to 1869 they relapse into the same state as after the 18th Brumaire.[25] Their privileges safe, they allow Napoléon III to plunder France, make her the vassal of Rome,[26] dishonour her in Mexico,[27] ruin

23 A reference to the French Revolution of 1830, also known as the July Revolution (*révolution de Juillet*), Second French Revolution or *Trois Glorieuses* in French, and to the July Monarchy (*Monarchie de juillet*), the censitary constitutional monarchy under Louis Philippe I (a member of the Orléans branch of the House of Bourbon known as '*le roi bourgeois*': the bourgeois king), which started with the July Revolution of 1830 and ended with the Revolution of February 1848.

24 A reference to the June Days uprising (*les journées de Juin*) by the workers of Paris, from 23 to 26 June 1848, when the French bourgeoisie massacred 3,000 workers and deported another 15,000.

25 A reference to Karl Marx's book *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*. The title refers to the Coup of 18 Brumaire in which Napoléon Bonaparte seized power in revolutionary France (9 November 1799, or 18 Brumaire Year VIII in the French Republican Calendar), in order to contrast it ironically with the coup of 2 December 1851 in which Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte assumed dictatorial powers. The Second French Empire was formally established on 2 December 1852, when Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte became 'Napoléon III, Emperor of the French'.

26 In November 1848, a revolution in the Papal States swept Pope Pius IX from power, and he called upon the Catholic powers to restore his authority. The newly-elected French president (soon to be self-appointed emperor), Louis-Napoléon (Napoléon III), decided to appease French Catholics and forestall an Austrian invasion, by intervening. French troops laid siege to Rome between 30 April and 1 July 1849, crushed the Roman Republic and remained there to protect the Papal States and prevent the final unification of Italy until the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War in July 1870, which prompted Napoléon III to recall his garrison from Rome. The city was occupied by the troops of the Kingdom of Italy on 20 September 1870, and Rome and what was left of the Papal States were annexed to the Kingdom of Italy after a plebiscite on this matter was held in October of the same year.

27 The Second French Intervention in Mexico was an invasion of Mexico, launched in late 1861, by the Second French Empire (1852–70). Initially supported by the United Kingdom and Spain, the French intervention in Mexico took place after President Benito Juárez declared a two-year moratorium, on 17 July 1861, on loan-interest payments to French,

her finances, vulgarise debauchery. All-powerful by their retainers and their wealth, they do not risk a man, a dollar, for the sake of protesting. In 1869 the pressure from without raises them to the verge of power; a little strength of will and the government is theirs. They have but the velleity of the eunuch. At the first sign of the impotent master they kiss the rod that smote them on the 2nd December [of 1851], making room for the plebiscite which rebaptises the [Second] Empire.[28]

Bismarck prepared the war, Napoléon III wanted it, the great bourgeoisie looked on. They might have stopped it by an earnest gesture. M. Thiers contented himself with a grimace. He saw in this war our certain ruin; he knew our terrible inferiority in everything; he could have united the Left, the *tiers-parti* [*die Mittelpartei*], the journalists, have made palpable to them the folly of the attack, and, supported by this strength of opinion, have said to the Tuileries, to Paris if needs be, 'War is impossible; we shall combat it as treason.' He, anxious only to clear himself, simply demanded the despatches instead of speaking the true word, 'You have no chance of success.'[29] And these great bourgeois, who would not have risked the least part of their fortunes without the most serious guarantees,

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British and Spanish creditors. On 31 October 1861, France, the United Kingdom, and Spain agreed to the Convention of London, a joint effort to extract repayments from Mexico. On 8 December, the Spanish fleet disembarked troops at the port of Veracruz, on the Gulf of Mexico. When the British and the Spanish discovered that France had unilaterally planned to seize Mexico, they withdrew from the military coalition agreed in London. The subsequent French invasion created the Second Mexican Empire (1861–7), a client state of the French Empire. After prolonged guerrilla warfare that continued in the aftermath of the Capture of Mexico City in 1863, the French Empire withdrew from Mexico and abandoned the Austrian emperor; subsequently, the Mexicans executed Emperor Maximilian I, on 19 June 1867, and restored the Mexican Republic.

28 A reference to the tenure of Émile Ollivier, a former republican, as *Chef du cabinet* under Napoléon III (2 January–10 August 1870). The *sénatus-consulte* of 8 September 1869 gave the two chambers ordinary parliamentary rights, and was followed by the dismissal of Eugène Rouher and the formation in the last week of that year of the Ollivier cabinet, known as the ministry of 2 January. On 8 May 1871 the amended constitution was submitted to a plebiscite, which resulted in a vote of nearly seven-to-one in favour of the government. This appeared to confirm that Napoléon III's son would succeed him and was a blow to the Republicans, but shortly afterward the Second French Empire collapsed under the impact of the defeat at the Battle of Sedan (1–2 September 1870) during the Franco-Prussian War.

29 That is, Thiers only demanded that the government present to parliament the telegrams sent to Bismarck in the framework of the dispute with Germany over the succession to the throne of Spain, in particular after the incident of the Ems Dispatch, which led to the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War.

> staked 100,000 lives and the milliards of France on the word of a Leboeuf and the equivocations of a Gramont.[30]

Marx then introduced changes in the section dealing with the '*petite bourgeoisie*', adding after the sentence 'with its bold initiative, its revolutionary instinct, it loses also the consciousness of its force' the following one: 'Instead of representing itself, as it might so well do, it goes about in quest of representatives among the Liberals.' And he closed the paragraph dedicated to the Liberals with an addendum rendered into English by his daughter as follows:

> For the timid or ambitious they founded the 'open Left,' a bench of candidates for public office; and in 1870 a number of Liberals indeed solicited official functions. For the '*intransigeants*' there was the 'closed Left,' where the irreconcilable dragons Gambetta, Crémieux, Arago, Pelletan guarded the pure principles. The chiefs towered in the centre. These two groups of augurs thus held every fraction of bourgeois opposition – the timorous and the intrepid. After the plebiscite[31] they became the holy synod, the uncontested chiefs of the small middle-class [*die Kleinbourgeoisie*], more and more incapable of governing itself, and alarmed at the Socialist movement, behind which they showed it the hand of the Emperor. It gave them full powers, shut its eyes, and allowed itself to drift gradually towards the parliamentary Empire, big with portfolios for its patrons. The thunderbolt of the defeats[32] galvanised it into life, but only for a moment. At the bidding of the deputies to keep quiet, the small middle-class, the

30 Lissagaray 1886, pp. 4–5; Lissagaray 1877, pp. 7–8. A reference to Edmond Leboeuf (1809–88), who in 1869 became minister of war and in the following year was promoted to Marshal of France. He fought in the Franco-Prussian War (1870), being taken prisoner when the Metz garrison surrendered to the Prussians. Antoine Alfred Agénor, tenth Duc de Gramont (1819–80), became conspicuous as a diplomat after Louis Napoléon's coup d'état of 2 December 1851. He was minister plenipotentiary at Cassel and Stuttgart (1852), at Turin (1853), ambassador at Washington DC (1854), Rome (1857) and at Vienna (1861). On 15 May 1870 he was appointed minister of foreign affairs in the Ollivier cabinet, and was thus largely responsible for the bungling of the negotiations between France and Prussia arising out of the candidature of Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen for the throne of Spain, which led to the disastrous war of 1870–1.

31 A reference to the constitutional referendum held in France on 8 May 1870. Voters were asked whether they approved of the liberal reforms made to the constitution since 1860 and passed by the *Sénatus-consulte* on 20 April 1870. The changes were approved by 82.7% of voters with an 81.3% turnout. Napoléon III received 7,350,000 votes in favour, 1,538,000 against, but in the cities the majority of the population voted against the government.

32 A reference to the Battle of Sedan, fought during the Franco-Prussian War from 1 to 2 September 1870. It resulted in the capture of Emperor Napoléon III and 104,000 of

> mother of the 10th August,[33] docilely bent its head and let the foreigner plunge his sword into the very bosom of France.[34]

Lissagaray went on to argue that towards the end of the Second French Empire there was no public life or activity except in the ranks of the young men of the proletariat and of the '*petite bourgeoisie*', who alone showed some political courage, and who, in the midst of the general paralysis of the month of July 1870, found the energy to attempt at least the salvation of France. If the workers failed to carry with them the '*petite bourgeoisie*', for the sake of whose interests they also fought, it was due to their want of political experience, which they could not acquire during the eighty years when the ruling class[35] deprived them of democratic rights (1794–1870). Then Marx added, in his daughter's rendering:

> Under the Empire, when the public meetings and journals reappeared, the political education of the workmen had still to be effected. Many, abused by morbid minds, in the belief that their affranchisement depended on a *coup-de-main*, gave themselves up to whoever spoke of overthrowing the Empire. Others, convinced that even the most thorough-going bourgeois were hostile to Socialism, and only courted the people in furtherance of their ambitious plans, wanted the workmen to constitute themselves into groups independent of all tutelage. These different currents crossed each other. The chaotic state of the party of action was laid bare in its journal, the *Marseillaise*, a hot mish-mash of doctrinaires and desperate writers united by hatred of the Empire, but without definite views, and above all, without discipline. Much time was wanted to cool down the first effervescence and get rid of the romantic rubbish which twenty years of oppression and want of study had made fashionable. However, the influence of the Socialists began to prevail, and no doubt with time they would have classified their ideas, drawn up their programme, eliminated the mere

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his troops, and in fact decided the war in favour of Prussia and its allies, though fighting continued under the Government of National Defence.

33 A reference to the Insurrection of 10 August 1792 (*Journée du 10 août 1792*), a defining event of the French Revolution. The storming of the Tuileries Palace by the National Guard of the Paris Commune and *fédérés* from Marseille and Brittany caused the fall of the French monarchy. King Louis XVI and the royal family took shelter with the suspended Legislative Assembly. The formal end of the monarchy occurred six weeks later as one of the first acts of the new National Convention.

34 Lissagaray 1886, pp. 6–7; Lissagaray 1877, pp. 9–10.

35 'The ruling class' was Eleanor Marx's conceptually more-clear rendering of Lissagaray's '*le Tiers-Etat*', which he identified with '*la bourgeoisie*' and contrasted with '*le quatrième état*'.

> spouters, entered upon serious action. Already, in 1869, working-men's societies, founded for mutual credit, resistance and study, had united in a Federation, whose headquarters were the Place de la Corderie du Temple. The International, setting forth the most adequate idea of the revolutionary movement of our century, under the guidance of Varlin, a bookbinder of rare intelligence, of Duval, Theisz, Frankel, and a few devoted men, was beginning to gain power in France. It also met at the Corderie, and urged on the more slow and reserved workmen's societies.[36]

Although, due to the fact that the International Working Men's Association was beginning to set foot in France, 'the public meetings of 1870 no longer resembled the earlier ones', many years were still required for the development of the revolutionary party, and the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War in July 1870 found it 'hampered by young bourgeois adventurers in search of a reputation, encumbered with conspiracy-mongers and romantic visionaries'. These people, Marx added, were 'still ignorant of the administrative and political mechanism of the bourgeois regime which they attacked'.[37]

Before the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, on 12 July 1870, the International had 27 sections in Paris that included 1,250 *cotisants* (dues-paying members), as well as 11 '*marmites*' (cooperative dining rooms) with 8,000 adherents. Furthermore, in December 1869 Eugène Varlin had created a *Chambre fédéral des Sociétés ouvrières* (the Federation mentioned by Marx), which 60 workers' societies had joined, 20 of which had also joined the International. The influence of the International extended, therefore, to the members of these societies, that is, to some 20,000 to 30,000 people.[38]

The Inaugural Address of the International Working Men's Association drafted by Marx had been a classic example of what came to be known, after the third congress of the Communist International, as 'united front' tactics: it formulated the basic demands around which the working class could and should unite in action, and from which the transitional and socialist demands of the *Communist Manifesto* would logically follow.[39] One shortcoming of this tactic, inevitable at that stage of development of the labour movement, was the political heterogeneity of the International, and particularly of its French sections.

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36 Lissagaray 1886, pp. 9–10; Lissagaray 1877, pp. 11–12.

37 Lissagaray 1886, p. 10; Lissagaray 1877, p. 12.

38 Rougerie 1972, pp. 8–13.

39 Riazanov 1927, p. 150.

In the last days of the Second Empire, the Blanquists practised 'entryism' *en masse* in the International. In fact, since the Brussels Congress of the International (September 1868) – which Blanqui followed very attentively – that is to say, since the Blanquists realised that the International, according to their expression, 'could become a powerful revolutionary lever', they took a very active part in its internal struggles of tendencies. Marx forged an alliance with them against the Proudhonists and used them as a counterweight to the Bakuninist faction. This counteracted to some extent the 'anti-political' ('abstentionist') tendency of the followers of Proudhon within the French sections, but also increased their heterogeneity.[40] The consequent lack of political centralisation manifested itself in the fact that the French internationalists did not have their own newspaper until the publication of *La Révolution politique et social* (an organ of the Gare d'Ivry et Bercy section, but which opened its columns to activists from all sections) from 2 April to 15 May 1871 – that is, until well *after* the Commune uprising, which took place on 18 March 1871.[41]

The Proclamation of the Third Republic and the Government of National Defence

France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War after the Battle of Sedan (1–2 September 1870) resulted in the collapse of Napoléon III's Second Empire (1852–70) and in the proclamation of the French Third Republic on 4 September 1870. In Paris, a Government of National Defence was set up, led by General Jules Trochu, which lasted from 4 September 1870 until 19 February 1871.

The International Working Men's Association was the first political formation to react after the proclamation of the Third Republic, constituting itself as the '*Fédération ouvrière parisienne*'. This Parisian Workers' Federation decided that all workers' associations had to meet in permanence (*seraient en permanence*) starting the following day, and that each of them had to send a delegate to the Federation. At the initiative of the International, '*comités républicains d'arrondissement*' (republican district committees) were formed, which were soon called, following the American nomenclature, '*comités de vigilance*' (in October 1870, the International had in Paris 11 sections and 4 *marmites*, and in January 1871, 14 sections and 2 *marmites*).[42]

40 Dommanget 1962, p. 553.
41 Rougerie 1972, pp. 54–5.
42 Rougerie 1972, pp. 14–15, 24, 29.

Shortly before the beginning of the siege of Paris, on 13 September 1870, the Republican Central Committee of the 20 Districts (*Comité central républicain des Vingt arrondissements*) was created to defend the Republic and to obtain from the Government of National Defence political and social measures favourable to the popular classes. The Republican Central Committee of the twenty districts posted the following day a billboard calling for the removal of the state police and its replacement by magistrates appointed by the municipalities and assisted by members of the National Guard; the election and accountability of all public officials; freedom of the press, assembly and association; and the requisition of goods and rationing to withstand the siege of the city by German troops, which lasted four months, from 20 September 1870 to 28 January 1871.

This appeal called for the election of a '*Commune*', but this word had different meanings for different people. For the moderates, who had become the majority in the Republican Central Committee of the twenty districts, the Commune was at best a kind of autonomous municipality of the capital, with ill-defined powers, especially in its relations with the government, while for the left-wing minority it was a kind of counter-government, which had to be created as soon as possible in order to achieve victory by revolutionary means.

During the siege of Paris, the French internationalists delivered, according to Marx, 'ultra-chauvinist speeches'. For example, the circular sent on January 1871 by Varlin, Malon and Bachruch on behalf of the Paris Federal Council of the International to their provincial 'brothers' to inform them about the situation in the capital called on them 'to overexcite by all possible means the patriotism that must save revolutionary France [*surexciter par tous les moyens possibles le patriotisme qui doit sauver la France révolutionnaire*]'. In the municipal elections that took place on 5 November 1870 in Paris, during the siege of the city, the internationalist candidates obtained poor results: only 9 internationalist municipal deputy magistrates (*magistrat adjoint*) were elected out of a total of 80 magistrates, and no mayors (*maire*).[43]

The Programme of the French Internationalists

The internationalists detailed their programme on 26 November 1870, in the Blanquist newspaper *La patrie en danger*, in a document published under the title 'Association Internationale'. In it they affirmed that the delegates of the workers' societies and the Parisian sections of the International Working Men's Association had opposed the war against Germany from the beginning,

43 Rougerie 1972, pp. 19, 37.

but that now France was being 'invaded by the Prussians and their vassals', the internationalists were 'determined to support all-out war [*à soutenir la guerre à outrance*], to reject any armistice, prelude to a shameful peace, to oppose any appeal addressed to the European monarchies on behalf of the French Republic.'[44]

The workers demanded from the Government of National Defence a solemn declaration affirming that the Republic was the only form of government acceptable to Paris; the postponement until after the war of any election to a National Assembly; the operation in practice of the republican institutions and the dismissal of the civil servants of the Empire; an all-out war and the rejection of the signing of any peace treaty while the Germans occupied French soil; the rejection of any armistice, of any preliminary peace not based on the principles 'not an inch of our territory, not a stone from our fortresses, not a penny from our budget'; the mobilisation of all healthy citizens, whatever their social position (seminar students, administrative employees, etc.); the requisition of the material and the workshops necessary for the equipment and manufacture, maintenance and repair of weapons (these workshops would be made available to workers *at cost price*, to avoid speculation); the immediate use of all the means of defence tested either by the official committees or by the vigilance committees; the guarantee to all citizens who were victims of the war, without distinction of rank, of a pension according to the needs of their families; the expropriation, for public use, of all essential items (food, clothing, heating) stored in Paris, *guaranteeing to their owners the reimbursement at cost price*; the guarantee of a ration to all citizens, distributed by the municipal authorities; the deprivation of civic rights and the immediate confiscation of the property, both movable and real estate, of those who had fled Paris without legitimate cause; and, finally, the suppression of rents until the end of the war.

The workers also demanded the election of a Paris municipal council; the determination of a precise mandate for all the elected officials and the right of their electors to recall them if they did not respect that mandate; the effective responsibility of all state officials; the suppression of the budget for religious worship; the abolition of the prefecture of the police, which was to be managed by the municipalities of the districts of Paris; the reorganisation of the magistracy on the basis of universal suffrage (that is to say, the popular election of judges); the immediate repeal of all laws that restricted the right of assembly, association and freedom of the press; and, finally, the revision of legislation.

44 *La patrie en danger*, of 26 November 1870, is available online at <https://www.retronews.fr/journal/la-patrie-en-danger/26-novembre-1870/2715/4390511/1>.

The workers' delegates declared themselves ready to postpone the discussion of economic questions ('questions of credit, of exchange, property, integral education, the organisation of labour, and questions relating to public services, permanent armies, debts, taxes') and were 'convinced that the study and *the conciliation of interests will accelerate a peaceful solution based on the principles of equality and justice*'. They declared that they had learned, through bitter experience, 'what a monarchy costs in shame, misery and oppression', and that they would not allow 'our Republic, the Republic of WORKERS AND PEASANTS, to serve as a springboard for some princely family, for a new Caesar'. They formulated their programme in federalist terms, stating: 'What we all want is for each commune to regain its municipal independence and to govern itself in the framework of free France.' They specified what they understood by 'the Republic of workers and peasants' stating: '*We want the LAND FOR THE PEASANT who cultivates it, the mine for the miner who exploits it, the factory for the worker that makes it prosper*' and concluded by stating that the struggle unfolded 'between the Republic and the Monarchy, between Socialism and Feudality. We must win, and our victory will result in the emancipation of the citizen, in the liberation of the peoples!' They concluded with a slogan that had already been raised in the revolution of 1848: 'Long live the universal, democratic and social Republic!'[45]

The limitations of this programme are obvious: its naive hope in a peaceful solution to class antagonisms, its insistence on the need to compensate expropriated property-owners, its opposition of socialism to feudalism rather than to capitalism, a certain chauvinistic tinge. Alongside them we find a correct emphasis on the self-government of workers and peasants in the framework of the communes, and on their emancipation through the appropriation of the land by the peasants, of the mines by the miners and of the factories by the workers. On the whole, it is clear that the workers in the capital, let alone in the provinces, were not mature enough organisationally and programmatically to seize power, despite which they would find themselves in control of Paris less than four months later.

The Elections to the National Assembly and the Treaty of Versailles

The siege of Paris ended on 28 January 1871, when the Franco-German armistice was signed. The National Guard had by then grown to 340,000 members.

45 Rougerie 1971, pp. 54–8.

The armistice was followed by the celebration of elections to the National Assembly on 8 February 1871, which resulted in a reactionary majority (dubbed 'the rurals' by the Parisian workers) and the formation of a counterrevolutionary provisional government headed by Adolphe Thiers.

In the elections held on 8 February 1871 to the National Assembly, the internationalists presented a single list of 43 candidates, which included members of the International, of the *Chambre fédérale des sociétés ouvrières* and of the *Comité central républicain des Vingt arrondissements de Paris*. The candidates on that list received 49,340 votes, out of a total of 300,000. Among those elected to the Assembly of Versailles on the International's list, one of them (Henri Tolain) turned out to be a traitor to the Commune, while another (Benoît Malon) engaged in equivocal behaviour. But the fact that in the list of candidates of the International there were members of the *Comité central républicain des Vingt arrondissements* indicated an important rapprochement between the International and the National Guard, which would play a central role in the Commune: there were 16 internationalists among the 30 members of the Central Committee of the *Garde nationale*, that is, slightly more than half, although they acted in a personal capacity.

On 26 February 1871 Thiers and Bismarck signed the Treaty of Versailles, which ended the Franco-Prussian War. The terms of the treaty included a war-indemnity of five billion francs to be paid by France to Germany (the German army would continue to occupy parts of France until the payment was complete), the recognition of Wilhelm I as the Kaiser of the newly united German Empire and, in the final Treaty of Frankfurt ratified on 10 May of the same year, the annexation of Alsace and the Moselle region of Lorraine to Germany, which eventually resulted in some 160,000 refugees.

Meanwhile, in Paris, on 15 February 1871, the delegates of all the districts (except the first and the second) decided to elect a provisional commission charged with drafting the statutes of a Republican Federation of the National Guard. On 24 February, a meeting of nearly 2,000 delegates representing 200 battalions approved a motion affirming that it would not accept the disarmament of the National Guard by the Thiers government and calling on the provinces to imitate Paris. On 28 February, the provisional commission regrouped the guns of the National Guard in the neighbourhoods of Montmartre and Belleville, to avoid clashes with the parade of German soldiers in Paris held under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. On 10 March, a general assembly of battalion delegates proclaimed the end of the permanent army and the instauration of Parisian self-government, refusing to obey the orders of the general d'Aurelle de Paladines, who had been appointed Commander-in-Chief of the National

Guard by Thiers. On 15 March, 1,325 delegates representing 215 battalions of the National Guard elected a Central Committee of the National Guard (*Comité central de la Garde nationale*).

The Insurrection of 18 March 1871 and the Election of the Paris Commune

The uprising that finally gave birth to the Paris Commune took place on 18 March 1871 (*Soulèvement du 18 mars 1871*). On Thiers' orders, before daybreak on 18 March, several thousand French regular troops marched up the streets of Montmartre to capture by surprise hundreds of cannons parked on top of the hill by units of the National Guard. Thousands of local National Guards, women and children turned out to obstruct their march and argue with the outnumbered and unenthusiastic soldiers. A few shots were fired by both sides, but generally the soldiers ignored their officers' orders to force back the crowds. Some handed over their rifles and fraternised with the civilians. Officers were disregarded, and several were arrested by the crowd. Similar scenes took place elsewhere in the city. The Commander of the troops at Montmartre, General Lecomte, and the hated former commander-in-chief of the Paris National Guard, Clément-Thomas, grabbed by the crowd, were later shot by National Guards and local civilians. Across the city, people threw up barricades as in 1848 and 1830. The government led by Thiers and the army high command, convinced that they had lost control of the capital, retreated with all available troops to Versailles, 17 kilometres south-west of Paris, where the National Assembly arrived from Bordeaux on 20 March. The Central Committee of the Republican Federation of the Paris National Guard (*Comité central de la Garde nationale* or *fédérés*) established a provisional authority at the *Hôtel de Ville* (City Hall).

On 19 March, the day after the insurrection in Paris, the Central Committee of the National Guard refused to march on Versailles, where Thiers and the government had taken refuge. This was, for Marx, their first great mistake: 'They should have marched at once on Versailles after first Vinoy[46] and then the reactionary section of the Paris National Guard had themselves retreated.

46 Joseph Vinoy (1803–80) was a general during the Second French Empire. Following the forced resignation of Trochu after the defeat of Buzenval on 20 January 1871, Vinoy became commander in chief of the army of Paris. He held important commands in the army of Versailles, occupying the Tuileries and the Louvre on 23 May 1871. On 4 April he ordered the shooting of captured officers, including the Communard General Émile-Victor Duval.

They missed their opportunity because of conscientious scruples. They did not want *to start a civil war*, as if that mischievous abortion Thiers had not already started the civil war with his attempt to disarm Paris!'[47] The Central Committee of the National Guard announced that municipal elections would be held on 22 March, at the rate of one Councillor per 20,000 inhabitants. In Marx's opinion, this was their 'Second mistake: The Central Committee surrendered its power too soon, to make way for the Commune. Again from a too "honourable" scrupulosity!'[48]

In an addendum to Chapter IV of Lissagaray's book, Marx explained this mistake on the grounds that the Commune had become the focal point of the popular aspirations in the French capital during the Second Empire, because Paris had been deprived of the right to choose its own mayor ever since July 1794, after the 9th Thermidor, the coup d'état that deposed and executed Robespierre:

> Under the Empire this was one of the favourite schemes of the Left, by which it had mainly won over the small Parisian bourgeoisie [*Pariser Kleinbürgerthum*], much humiliated at the sight of Governmental nominees enthroned at the *Hôtel-de-Ville* for full eighty years. Even the most pacific amongst them were shocked, scandalised by the incessant increase of the budget, the multiplied loans, and the financial swindling of Haussmann. And how they applauded [Ernest] Picard, revindicating for the largest and most enlightened city of France at least the rights enjoyed by the smallest village, or when he defied the Pasha of the Seine to produce regular accounts! Towards the end of the Empire, the idea of an elective municipal council had taken root; it had to a certain extent been put into practice during the siege, and now its total realisation could alone console Paris for her 'decapitalisation'.[49]
>
> On the other hand, the popular masses, insensible to the bourgeois ideal of a municipal council, were bent on the Commune. They had called for it during the siege as an arm against the foreign enemy; they still called for it as a lever for uprooting despotism and misery. What did they care for a council, even elective, but without real liberties and fettered to the state – without authority over the administration of schools

47 Marx's letter to Kugelmann from 12 April 1871, in Marx and Engels 1971, p. 284, emphasis in the original.

48 Marx's letter to Kugelmann from 12 April 1871, in Marx and Engels 1971, p. 284.

49 Even before the declaration of the Commune, the National Assembly led by Thiers and the 'rurals' had 'decapitalised' Paris by selecting Versailles as its headquarters [D.G.].

> and hospitals, justice and police, and altogether unfit for grappling with the social slavery of its fellow-citizens? What the people strove for was a state form allowing them to work for the amelioration of their condition. [*Was das Volk suchte, war eine Staatsform, die ihm an der Verbesserung seines Looses zu arbeiten verlaubte*.] They had seen all the constitutions and all the representative governments run counter to the will of the so-called represented elector, and the state power, grown more and more despotic, despoil the workmen even of the right to defend his labour, and this power, which has ordained even the very air to be breathed, always refusing to interfere in capitalist brigandage. After so many failures, they were fully convinced that the actual governmental and legislative regime was from its very nature unable to emancipate the working-man. This emancipation they expected from the autonomous Commune, sovereign within the limits compatible with the maintenance of the national unity. The communal constitution was to substitute for the representative lording it over his elector the strictly responsible mandatory. The old state power grafted upon the country, feeding upon its substance, usurping supremacy on the foundation of divided and antagonistic interests, organising for the benefit of the few, justice, finance, army, and police, was to be superseded by a delegation of all the autonomous communes [*die Delegation mit eigenem Leben begabter Communen*: the delegation of communes gifted with their own life]. Thus the municipal question, appealing to the legitimate susceptibilities of the one, to the bold aspirations of the other, gathered all classes round the Central Committee.[50]

On 21–2 March, the Central Committee of the National Guard repressed the demonstrations that residents of the bourgeois neighbourhoods (*les Amis de l'Ordre*) organised to prevent the celebration of elections, which had to be postponed until 26 March. On 22 March, the Republican Central Committee of the Twenty *Arrondissements* joined the Central Committee of the National Guard, and on 23 March the International Working Men's Association, led by Léo Frankel, did the same.

The uprising of the Commune had taken place without the International playing any role in it as an organisation. It was not until 23 March 1871 that the internationalists supported the call of the Central Committee of the National Guard to hold municipal elections to the Commune – elections which, as we have seen, were considered a mistake by Marx, since they distracted the members of the National Guard from the urgent task of marching on the National Assembly in Versailles, which was only 17 kilometres away from the capital.

50 Lissagaray 1886, pp. 88–90; Lissagaray 1877, pp. 72–3.

The International, far from behaving as the vanguard of the insurrection, had been constantly outpaced by the revolutionary movement. However, as Rougerie pointed out, 'the day after March 18, the city found itself completely abandoned to itself, and it was mainly the internationalists who gave it life and made this insurrection, somewhat unexpected for them, survive'.[51]

In the elections for the Council of the Paris Commune held on 26 March 1871, 229,167 men voted, compared with some 300,000 in the general elections of 8 February. Many conservatives had left the city or boycotted the vote, so revolutionaries won 73 seats to the moderates' 19. This result consecrated the 18 March insurrection. The new city Council took the revolutionary title of Paris Commune, and was proclaimed on 28 March. The election result showed a large increase in support for the revolutionary Left, from 6,000 voters in the 1870 plebiscite, to 60,000 in the 8 February 1871 National Assembly elections, to 190,000 on 26 March. Only 40,000 votes went to anti-revolutionary republicans, usually the existing *arrondissement* mayors, of whom only 19 were elected; they had hoped to use the elections to defeat the revolutionary party and reach a compromise with Versailles, and, this tactic having failed, they resigned. This was also partly due to a shift in voter demographics, because many of the supporters of the moderate republicans had either left the city or chosen to abstain from the elections.

In the elections to the Commune held on 26 March, 32 internationalists were elected out of a total of 92 members. This number increased when 10 internationalists more were elected in the supplementary elections held on 16 April 1871, after which the internationalists constituted a majority of 42 members in a commune council (*conseil de la Commune*), whose number was reduced to 78 members, although the internationalists were members of that body in a personal capacity and not as an organised fraction. It was the presence of this worker contingent, despite its rudimentary organisation and of the limitations of their programme, that made the Commune 'the first socialist revolution'.[52] In the meantime, the armed struggle between the Communards and the Versailles forces broke out on 30 March 1871.

The Commune and Socialism

Marx added three paragraphs in Chapter VI, where Lissagaray reproduced a note from the *Journal Officiel* of 21 March 1871 entitled 'The Revolution of March 18th' that said:

51 Rougerie 1972, p. 60.

52 Rougerie 1972, pp. 71–2.

> The proletarians of the capital, amidst the failures and treasons of the ruling classes, have understood that the hour has struck for them to save the situation by taking into their own hands the direction of public affairs. Hardly possessed of the government, they have hastened to convoke the people of Paris to the ballot-boxes. There is no example in history of a provisional government so anxious to divest itself of its mandate. In the presence of conduct so disinterested, one may well ask how a press can be found unjust enough to pour out upon these citizens slander, contumely, and insult? The workingmen, those who produce everything and enjoy nothing, are they then forever to be exposed to outrage? The bourgeoisie, which has accomplished its emancipation, does it not understand that now the time for the emancipation of the proletariat is come? Why, then, does it persist in refusing the proletariat its legitimate share?[53]

Lissagaray commented that this was 'the first Socialist note struck in the movement', to which Marx added:[54]

> Parisian revolutions never remain purely political. The approach of the foreigner, the abnegation of the workmen, had, on the 4th September,[55] silenced all social demands. Peace once concluded, the workmen in power, their voice would naturally make itself heard. How just was this complaint of the Central Committee [of the National Guard]! What an act of accusation the French proletariat could draw up against its masters!
>
> What had the bourgeoisie done during an eighty-year reign for this child of the Faubourgs St Antoine and St Marceau, whom the winter of 1789 found without clothes and tools, and who in April had come to the primary assemblies [*Urversammlungen*] from which it was excluded? After giving birth to the revolution, founding the republic, saving the fatherland, spilling his blood in all the battlefields, renovating the means of production, and responding to every call for freedom, the only reward he received was a few machine gun salvos. This bourgeoisie, which had grabbed for itself the landed property, did not even know how to build schools for him. Its ordinances, which regulated even the desire to breathe, always refused to protect him against the plunder [*Räuberwirthschaft*] of capital. Three times it had pushed the unfortunate proletariat, to whom

53 Lissagaray 1886, p. 109. French original: 'La révolution du 18 mars', *Journal officiel de la Commune de Paris*, Mardi, 21 mars 1871, in *Réimpression du Journal officiel de la République française sous la commune, du 19 mars au 24 mai 1871* 1872, pp. 16–17.

54 The first paragraph was translated by Eleanor Marx, the following two by me.

55 A reference to 4 September 1870, the day of the proclamation of the French Third Republic.

> it had refused to give any education or help, under the foreigners' feet.[56] Had eighty years not provided enough evidence? Could the people not say, on 18 March 1871, broadening its great slogan of 1848: 'We have patiently served the bourgeoisie for eighty years?'
>
> Yes, the workers had the right to declare, through the mouth of the Central Committee [of the National Guard], that the hour had come for them to take charge of their affairs themselves, and no one among the ruling bourgeoisie could answer, 'We have done something for you.'[57]

Lissagaray then noted that the Commune suspended the sale of objects pledged in the pawnshops, prolonged the overdue bills for a month, and forbade landlords to dismiss their tenants till further notice, thus gaining the allegiance of the Parisian working masses. Of course, these measures were still a far cry from a socialist or communist economic programme; indeed, in a letter to Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis written on 22 February 1881, Marx argued that

> aside from the fact that this was merely an uprising of one city in exceptional circumstances, the majority of the Commune was in no sense socialist, nor could it have been. With a modicum of *common sense*, it could, however, have obtained the utmost that was then obtainable – a compromise with Versailles beneficial to the people as a whole. The appropriation of the Banque de France alone would have rapidly put an end to the vainglory of Versailles, etc., etc.[58]

However, the fact that Marx did not consider the uprising advisable in the circumstances in which it took place, and even that the majority of the Commune was not socialist, in the sense of having a communist economic programme, did not prevent him from describing the Commune as a workers' government, as we will see next.

Marx's Criticism of the Leaders of the Paris Commune

In Chapter XI Lissagaray commented on the newly elected members of the Commune assembled in the municipal council-hall that 'the ballot had returned sixteen mayors, adjuncts, and Liberals of all shades, a few Radicals,

56 A reference to France's military defeats in 1814, 1815 and 1870, which led to the invasion of the country by foreign troops.

57 Lissagaray 1886, pp. 109–10; Lissagaray 1877, p. 89.

58 Marx 1881, p. 66.

and about sixty Revolutionists of all sorts.' Marx substituted the next three paragraphs in Lissagaray's text for this analysis of the results of the elections to the Paris Commune, held on 26 March 1871:[59]

> How came the latter [the 'sixty Revolutionists of all sorts'] to be chosen? We must examine this question and speak out; we must finally set the invigorating truth in place of the ruinous embellishment [of what really happened]. The people will turn endlessly around in circles as long as it is in the dark about its revolutionary history.
>
> The history of the revolution has never been written down. No one has highlighted the personal intervention of the people in [France's] history, the power that occupied the Bastille, saved the revolution in Paris, protected its first steps, bled in the Champ-de-Mars, conquered the Tuileries, exterminated the Gironde, swept away the priests and the Catholic Church, was pushed back by Robespierre, rose again in Prairial,[60] disappeared for twenty years to reappear at the cannon-thunder of the Allies,[61] sunk into the night again, rose in 1830,[62] and, immediately repressed, convulsing under the oppression of the first years of capitalist rule, cut himself loose in 1848 and was massacred four months later by the bourgeois republic,[63] then, once more repressed, rose again in 1868,[64] shook the [Second French] Empire and brought it down, offered himself for the second time [to fight] against the foreign invader, was once again despised and rejected, until 18 March [1871,] when he crushed the hand that strangled him.

59 The German text differs significantly from Eleanor Marx's English version, so the seven paragraphs in the quotation are our own translation.

60 A reference to the insurrection of 1 Prairial Year III, a popular revolt in Paris on 20 May 1795 against the policies of the Thermidorian Convention which had executed Robespierre on 28 July 1794.

61 A reference to the Hundred Days (*les Cent-Jours*), the period between Napoléon's return from his exile on the island of Elba on 20 March 1815 and the second restoration of King Louis XVIII, which took place on 8 July 1815.

62 See footnote 24.

63 A reference to the 1848 Revolution in France, sometimes known as the February Revolution (*révolution de Février*), and to the June Days uprising (*les journées de Juin*) by the workers of Paris, from 23 to 26 June 1848, when the French bourgeoisie massacred 3,000 workers and deported another 15,000.

64 Several strikes broke out in France in 1868. The International Working Men's Association provided financial support, but the workers' revolts remained spontaneous. In Saint-Étienne, the workers were repressed and received strong support from the population, while in Lyon working women revolted.

No one has told the people how this power, which is irresistible when it asserts itself, has always been squandered, diverted, annihilated; how it could be averted, trapped, bridled; in a word, what its faults and the causes of its fatalities have been; a difficult and particularly an unpopular task. Instead, the people has been overwhelmed by a swarm of declaimers and sectarians with hyperboles, myths, and legends, some of whom crawl to win the favour of the people; others who are only anxious to climb up the social ladder, too vain and empty-headed to take on the role of modest educators; and then again others who are out for a bunch of blind hotheads to be guided by them. According to them, the history of the Commune should be written in dithyrambs, for in their eyes any investigation of the truth is a crime, and every criticism of revolutionary actions is a libel.

As if progress were only possible in the dark! What, this people of 1830, 1848, 1871, which revolted time and time again, which yesterday defied all social powers and fell by the thousands, without uttering a call for mercy, must be cheated in order to move forward as if he were incapable of facing the truth? Away with you, literary jugglers, conspirators without a compass! No longer block the way for revolution! No, the people have neither weak nerves, nor a skull as thick as you think; no, they do not demand to be handled with velvet gloves; their first, their greatest friend, Marat, was the one who spoke most clearly to them. No, the revolution is not the work of the blind. If a party needs wisdom, clarity, reason, leadership, it is the revolutionary party. Its greatness and vitality never appear more clearly than when it courageously tears away the plaster from its wounds.

About the Commune, as well as about everything else, one must speak the truth or remain silent. Silence is impossible, because France, the whole world, is flooded with false or untrue stories, and thousands of victims are slandered. For them, for a not too distant future, we must speak. But if the Commune, despite its extraordinary resources, was defeated, it is clear that mistakes have been made. So, let us acknowledge them; false reports, that are inexcusable during the struggle, become ridiculous after a defeat. Sincere persons prove their devotion by acknowledging their faults and wanting them to serve as lessons for the future; the others deserve no consideration.

At the memorial service of the proscripts held in London on 18 March 1871, former members of the Council of the Commune said: 'Let us learn, let us educate ourselves, we went down because of our ignorance.' Such

> words scare the bourgeoisie, which laughs at all the boasting. It is afraid of the sharp-sighted, not of the self-deluded.
>
> May others embellish the history of the Commune like a theatrical decoration with ornaments and imaginary landscapes, and under the pretext of glorifying the vanquished prepare the hecatombs of the future! This history is written neither for the urchins nor for the cliques. Its author has no other purpose than to show the people the true course of this battle, to show them how far the French Revolutionary Party went in 1871, and to sharply illuminate before the coming generation the bloodstream left by its predecessor. So, I am not going to describe the ideal Commune, or the Commune as we would have wanted it, but the Commune as it was, just as the circumstances and the people made it. It is even more terrible than misfortune to misjudge or deny its causes.[65]

Then come seven paragraphs added by Marx, some of them left out and some whose location was shifted by Eleanor in the English version; in full translation they read:

> Responsibility weighs heavily enough upon the elected, but we must not charge it all to one side – the electors also have their share of it.
>
> The Central Committee had told the people on Sunday, 19 March 1871, 'Prepare for your communal elections.' They thus had a whole week in which to frame a mandate and select their mandatories. The Committee of the 20 Arrondissements published a manifesto, very adequate on several points, which could have served as a framework; the two delegates of the interior strove, in an article published in the *Journal officiel de la Commune de Paris*, to convince Paris of the importance of its vote.[66] No doubt the resistance of the mayors and the occupation of military posts kept away many of the revolutionary electors from their *arrondissements*, but there still remained enough citizens to conduct the work of selection [of the members of the Commune].
>
> Never had a mandate been more indispensable, for the question at issue was to give Paris a communal constitution acceptable to all France. Never did Paris stand in such need of enlightened and practical men, capable at once of both negotiating and fighting.

65 Lissagaray 1877, pp. 123–5.

66 Proclamation de délégués de l'intérieur Ant. Arnaud, Ed. Vaillant, *Journal officiel de la Commune de Paris*, Samedi, 25 mars 1871.

And yet there have never been less preparatory discussions. This Paris, always so anxiously cautious in election matters, and always able to express its will to its representatives, did not formulate that will. Hardly two or three *arrondissements* set up a kind of programme. Instead of voting for a programme, the people chose names.

That was an echo of the siege time. Those who declaimed at the Place de la Corderie du Temple, in the clubs, or in journalism against the men of 4 September 1870, were applauded (only five to six of the unknown people in the Central Committee of the National Guard were elected) without being demanded a statement of their ideas. Of course, it seemed logical to send to the townhouse those who had been demanding the Commune for seven months, but the men of instinct are not always men of action. And since the people did not fulfil their task of defining the mandate of their representatives, they renewed their previous abdication [of their rights] and thereby granted their leaders an excuse to justify their weakness.

Several of those chosen as representatives were revolutionary veterans: Blanqui, Delescluze, Gambon, Miot, Félix Pyat. Blanqui had been arrested on the 17th in the province where he had gone to restore his health. The only active man in this group, who possessed a straight and firm mind, [Louis Charles] Delescluze, could scarcely sustain himself; the cruel sufferings in the prison at Vincennes had completely broken his feeble body. Then came the most eminent men from the revolutionary party under the Empire, from the Corderie, from journalism, from the last events: Ranvier, Flourens, Lefrançais, Tridon, Duval, Vermorel, Brunel, Vallès, Vaillant, Theisz, Varlin, etc.; generally very intelligent people, some diligent and educated, but accustomed to include France in Paris, altogether very little up to date, and ignorant of the province and of the resources available to their powerful enemies.

Finally, the clubs, inflamed by the resistance of the existing district mayors, elected the most violent declaimers, the romantics who appeared during the siege and lacked any knowledge of practical life. These were, above all, people who followed their impulse, without knowledge of practical life, without understanding of men, of things, of history. Very inflated by their successes as tribunes, they succumbed to the first intelligent declaimer who knew how to flatter their pride.[67]

67 Lissagaray 1886, pp. 154–5; Lissagaray 1877, pp. 125–6.

The Commune as a Workers' Government

This criticism of the leaders of the Paris Commune is followed by a striking paragraph which appears only in the German version:

> The Commune has been called a working-class government. That is a big mistake. [*Man hat die Commune eine Regierung der Arbeiterklasse genannt. Das ist ein großer Irrtum.*] The working class was in the struggle, in the administration, and its influence alone made this movement great, but it had very little involvement in the government. Most of the members of the International who were elected owed this to their personal reputation. The vote of 26 March had resulted in only 25 workers elected in 70 revolutionary elections, of whom only 13 belonged to the International, the 12 others came from the clubs. In 6 double elections, only two workers were elected, Varlin and Theisz. Two-thirds of the Council of the Commune were thus composed of petty bourgeois [*Kleinbürgern*] of the so-called liberal professions. Accountants, doctors, lawyers, publicists – there were up to a dozen of them. A very small number – only five or six – had some knowledge about the social questions.[68]

The following five paragraphs of Marx's additions were shortened by his daughter, they read in full:

> Thus the precipitation and heedlessness of the revolutionary electors sent up to the Hôtel-de-Ville a majority of men, most of them devoted, but chosen without discernment, and, into the bargain, abandoned them to their own inspirations, to their whims, without any determined mandate to restrain and guide them in the struggle entered upon.
>
> Time and experience would no doubt have corrected this negligence, but time was wanting. The people never hold sway but for an hour, and woe to them if they are not then ready, armed *cap-a-pie* [from head to foot]. The elections of the 26th March were irreparable.
>
> The meeting was opened at eight o'clock in that hall of the Municipal Council, where the people had lost the 31st of October.[69] It was small, very

68 Lissagaray 1877, pp. 126–7.

69 A reference to the uprising of 31 October 1870 (*Soulèvement du 31 octobre 1870*), which took place in Paris during the siege of the capital, at the time of the Franco-Prussian War. Its goals were to fight against the defeatist military policy of the Government of National Defence and to proclaim the Commune.

> ill-suited for an assembly; the benches, the seats, came so close together that the discussion became too personal and discipline difficult. From the opening there was some disorder.
>
> Only sixty councillors were in place. The eldest, [Charles] Beslay, a revolutionary-minded capitalist, who had swung from the parliamentarism of 1830 to republicanism, then to socialism, a member of the International who dreamed of reconciling the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, took the presidency chair.
>
> Some members of the Central Committee of the National Guard had come to introduce those elected. The Council of the Commune voted unanimously that the Central Committee had rendered outstanding services to Paris and the republic. A noisy, confused discussion ensued on the verification of the mandates; the hotheads made random requests, they even demanded that the Commune declare itself omnipotent. It finally got to the point of establishing a little order and the president was able to read his opening speech.[70]

Three paragraphs later, Marx made a new addition to Lissagaray's text which Eleanor shortened into one paragraph. After describing the departure of Pierre Tirard, who had argued that his mandate was purely municipal and that he could not recognise the political character of the Commune, Marx commented in the German version:

> This stormy departure plunged the Council of the Commune into its first and most deadly mistake. Secret meetings were called for and this motion immediately found a majority. An incomprehensible idea, as it came from revolutionaries and especially from those elected by Paris. How could they think of hiding from Paris, after having protested the secrecy of the Government of National Defence, after receiving the vote of confidence of the 26th?[71] If ever the elected needed the inspiration of Paris, it was those whose mandate was so little determined. It was forgotten, therefore, that the only merit of the old Commune of Paris [of 1792–3] was that it heard Paris, that it was constantly following Paris's thought, that all the actions, all the salutary decisions, all the mighty points of view, all the impulse, absolutely everything that brought honour to the Commune

70 Lissagaray 1877, p. 127.

71 A reference to the elections for the Council of the Paris Commune, held on 26 March 1871.

came from the sections, the clubs, the popular societies;[72] that the people pushed it forward at every moment, that the people had to spur on even its best members, like Chaumette, that it would have died of exhaustion without those spiritually-inspiring speaker's platforms, without that stream of deputations and delegations which was constantly rolling past their gates. Several members of the Council of the Commune protested against these closed-door sessions, which mocked all reason and the best traditions and isolated the *Hôtel-de-Ville* (townhouse) from Paris. They were told that the charlatans' declamations had to be stopped, as if the public had not issued its own verdict on them; that the hall was too small, as if they were bound to it; that certain measures required discretion, as if they could not have set up a secret committee. The real reason was that the former conspirators were still craving for secrecy, that others feared criticism, and that the masses of the romantics trustingly applauded everything that tasted of authority.

This measure made a very bad impression in Paris. The Council of the Commune upset everybody without reaching its goal, for indiscreet colleagues told of the sessions, and their comments were then published by the reactionary newspapers. In order to put an end to the reports of lies, fourteen days later it was decided to publish a report of the sessions in the *Journal Officiel*. But this publicity was a mutilated, unsatisfactory one. The public should have been present, the people should have stood at the galleries and in front of the barriers to inspire their representatives, to guide them, to compel them to study, to restrain the over-excited ones.

The following day, at the opening of the session, an admirer of Blanqui proposed to grant him the honorary presidency. Delescluze fought against this idea, borrowed from the public assemblies under the [Second French] Empire, and said that representatives were at the *Hôtel-de-Ville* (townhouse) to do a serious job, not to agitate. It was decided that the President should be elected at every meeting, which was all the more

72 The petite bourgeoisie, which recognises in them its glory and perhaps would rediscover in them the awareness of its duties, lacks a history of the sections and clubs not only of Paris, but of all France. And who will write the history of the popular societies? Who will lay an ear on the hearts of these poor people to describe how noble they were? Those who leaf through these scanty imperfect protocols will only find words of brotherhood, adoption of orphans, mutual support of the propertyless. This history is far more human than that of the sections. Whoever undertakes this inglorious and dry work, will be a better friend of the people than the Ossianian writers fishing for applause. [A reference to Ossian, a legendary Gaelic poet and purported author of a cycle of epic poems published by the Scottish poet James Macpherson in 1762 – D.G.] [Marx's note.]

> harmful to the discipline and the spirit of unity as the Council of the Commune failed to adopt a set of rules [*Reglement*]. A presidency of at least eight days would have been necessary and equally democratic.[73]

Marx's next addition appears in the paragraph pointing out that the programme of the Commune (the *Déclaration au Peuple français* of 19 April 1871) was kept in suspense for 22 days, which meant that 'the Council had allowed all the insurrections of the provinces to die out without giving them any advice or ideas'.[74] Moreover, the 'Declaration to the French People' not only came too late, but revealed the political limitations of the leaders of the Commune:

> To the rest of the world [the 'Declaration to the French People'] said nothing. This revolution, which had been made under the slogan 'Long live the universal republic,' the greatest of all the uprisings of labour against capital, did not seem to know that there were other peoples, that there was a working-class family outside [France]. As all the bourgeoisies stood united against it,[75] Paris did not seem to suspect that it was the champion of labour and that the Commune of 1871 was the successor of the Commune of 1793, which had called upon all humanity [to revolt].[76]

The Split between the Majority and the Minority in the Council of the Commune

On 28 April Jules Miot had proposed to the Council of the Commune to create a Committee of Public Safety, imitating what the Montagnards of 1793 had done to face up to the dangers that threatened the First French Republic. This initiative met the opposition of a minority of the elected officials of the Commune, and it was not until 1 May 1871 that the *Comité de salut public* was accepted by 45 votes to 23. Despite the protests and the abstention of the minority, a committee of 5 members was elected, composed of Armand Antoine, Jules Arnaud, Leo Melliet, Gabriel Ranvier, Félix Pyat (who resigned

73 Lissagaray 1877, pp. 128–9.

74 Lissagaray 1886, p. 160; Lissagaray 1877, p. 131. The 'Declaration to the French People' of 19 April 1871, the only official programme of the Commune, is reproduced in Edwards (ed.) 1973, pp. 81–3.

75 A reference to the aid supplied by Bismarck to Thiers and the Versailles assembly, and to the smear campaign against the Paris Commune in the bourgeois press throughout Europe.

76 Lissagaray 1877, p. 164.

on 5 May), and Charles Gérardin. On 15 May 1871 a crisis broke out between the majority and the minority of the Council of the Commune over this issue, as a result of which the minority published a manifesto. The 79 members of the Council of the Commune (of whom 34 belonged to the International) thus split between a majority of 45 members, supported by the Jacobins and the Blanquists, and a dissenting minority of 23 members, led by the Proudhonist members of the International. The majority excluded the minority from discussions and from the commissions, and on 15 May the minority ceased to attend the Commune's meetings.

Marx commented in Chapter XIX, in the section of Lissagaray's book dealing with the creation of the Committee of Public Safety:

> While all the bourgeois and monarchist parties silenced their hostilities to confront insurgent Paris, in the Council of Paris there were people who formed a minority in the midst of the struggle. And this minority included, with about ten exceptions, the most intelligent and educated members of the Council of the Commune.[77] How is this strange situation to be explained? How did it happen that precisely these men exercised no influence on their colleagues? They lacked more than anything political insight.
>
> The Council of the Commune had the general illusion that it would endure, so much so that it stipulated a deadline of seven months to redeem the objects from the pawnshops, and that it postponed the repayment of the signed debts for three years. Many of the minority went on with this error, they did not want to admit that this Commune was a barricade, but wanted it to be a real Commune. This was the general error, the superstitious belief in their governmental longevity. Some resisted the principle of authority to the point of committing suicide, they were not ready to make any allowances for the necessities of the struggle even for the sake of victory and said: 'We stood for liberty under the Empire; now that we are in power, we will not deny it.' Even in exile they have claimed that the Commune was ruined due to its authoritarian tendencies. Beside these there were other, more positive minds, who only intended to protest against the lack of method, determination, and seriousness of the

77 The minority formed a nucleus of twenty-two members: Andrieu, Arnold, A. Arnould, Avrial, Beslay, Clémence, V. Clément, Courbet, Frankel, E. Gérardin, Jourde, Lefrançais, Longuet, Malon, Ostyn, Pindy, Serraillier, Theisz, Tridon, Vallès, Varlin, Vermorel. [Marx's note, in Eleanor's translation.]

> majority. But they did nothing to win over their colleagues, and seemed to wait for all the world to come to them, as Tridon had done.[78]

Then Marx added a series of observations on Gustave Tridon and Auguste-Jean-Marie Vermorel, as well as on the disgraceful role played by Félix Pyat, which he contrasted with the honourable conduct of Louis Charles Delescluze. Marx argued that 'the minority, consisting of theoreticians and non-influential men, incapable of taking into account either the circumstances or the weaknesses of the majority, trapped in its own autonomist principle-prattle, contented itself with violently protesting, and thereby it only managed to incite the others [i.e. the members of the majority].'[79] Marx's comments on the minority's Manifesto were rendered by Eleanor Marx in the English version as follows:

> Several members of the minority brought the question before public meetings, which called on them to return to their posts. Those of the fourth arrondissement gave an explanation in the Théâtre-Lyrique, in which they said 'that their guiding principle was that the Commune was to be only the executive agent of the public will, manifesting itself continually, and indicating day by day what was to be done to secure the triumph of the revolution.' No doubt that principle was correct, and the revolution can only be made safe by the direct legislation of the people. But was this a time to legislate when the cannon ruled supreme? And in the midst of the fire, is the 'executive agent' to expect that the soldier who does battle for him will also bring him ideas?[80]

The Pulling-Down of the Vendôme Column and the Role of Foreigners in the Commune

Marx commented in the same Chapter XIX on the destruction of the monument to Napoléon's victory at Austerlitz in 1805, the column in the Place Vendôme, which was pulled down on 16 May 1871 to the sound of the *Marseillaise*. In his daughter's rendering, he argued that 'its demolition, the idea of which had

78 Lissagaray 1886, pp. 243–4; Lissagaray 1877, pp. 195–6.
79 Lissagaray 1877, pp. 196–7.
80 Lissagaray 1886, p. 288; Lissagaray 1877, p. 230.

become quite current during the first siege,[81] was decreed on the 12th April.[82] This inspiration, popular, humane, profound, showing that a war of classes was to supersede the war of nations, aimed at the same time a blow at the ephemeral triumph of the Prussian.'[83]

Marx struck a similarly internationalist note when he referred, in Chapter XXV of Lissagaray's book, to the role played by Jarosław Dąbrowski, a Polish nobleman and military officer in the Imperial Russian Army, who took part in the January 1863 Uprising in Poland and served as general and military commander of the Paris Commune in its final days. In Eleanor's English version it reads:

> He [Jarosław Dąbrowski] received no reinforcements despite his despatches to the War Office; believed the game lost, and said so but too often.
>
> This is my only reproach, for you do not expect me to apologise for the Commune's having allowed foreigners to die for it. Is not this the revolution of all proletarians? Is it not for the people to at last do justice to that great Polish race which all French governments have betrayed?[84]

This coincides with Marx's comments on the heroic role played by foreigners in the Commune in *The Civil War in France*:

> The Commune admitted all foreigners to the honour of dying for an immortal cause. Between the foreign war lost by their treason, and the civil war fomented by their conspiracy with the foreign invader, the bourgeoisie had found the time to display their patriotism by organising police-hunts upon the Germans in France. The Commune made a German working man [Léo Frankel] its Minister of Labour. Thiers, the bourgeoisie, the Second Empire, had continually deluded Poland by loud professions of sympathy, while in reality betraying her to, and doing the dirty work of, Russia. The Commune honoured the heroic sons of Poland [Jarosław Dąbrowski and Walery Wróblewski] by placing them at the head of the defenders of Paris. And, to broadly mark the new era of history it was conscious of initiating, under the eyes of the conquering Prussians,

81 During the first siege, the *Journal Officiel* of the *mairie* of Paris had inserted a letter from Courbet demanding the overthrow of the column. [Marx's note, in Eleanor's translation.]

82 Thus Courbet was not as yet a member of the Council. Nevertheless he was considered the principal author of the fall of the column, and condemned in the costs of its re-erection. [Marx's note, in Eleanor's translation.]

83 Lissagaray 1886, p. 290; Lissagaray 1877, pp. 230–1.

84 Lissagaray 1886, p. 299; Lissagaray 1877, pp. 238–9.

> on the one side, and of the Bonapartist army, led by Bonapartist generals, on the other, the Commune pulled down that colossal symbol of martial glory, the Vendôme column.[85]

The Defeat of the Commune and the Execution of Prisoners by the Versailles Forces

With the quick suppression of communes that arose at Lyon, Saint-Étienne, Marseille, and Toulouse, the Commune of Paris alone faced the opposition of the Versailles government. But the *fédérés*, as the insurgents were called, were unable to organise themselves militarily and take the offensive, and, on 21 May, government troops entered an undefended section of Paris. During *la semaine sanglante*, or 'bloody week', that followed, from 21 to 28 May 1871, the regular troops crushed the opposition of the Communards.

In Chapter XXXIII of Lissagaray's book, in the section dealing with the execution of prisoners by the Versailles forces led by General Galliffet, known as the *Fusilleur de la Commune* (the 'Commune's executioner'), Marx added a description of how, after he had gathered enough prisoners, Galliffet involved the correspondent of the British *Daily News* in a *razzia* and, although the latter complained, he had to accompany the column to La Muette. The journalist described the execution of prisoners in a report that appeared in the *Daily News* on 8 June 1871; the original report was included by Eleanor Marx as an appendix to the English edition, while a German version of the report was included in Chapter XXXIII of the German edition. The original reads as follows:

> The column of prisoners halted in the Avenue Uhrich, and was drawn up four or five deep on the footway facing to the road. General Marquis de Gallifet and his staff, who had preceded us there, dismounted, and commenced an inspection from the left of the line and near where I was. Walking down slowly and eyeing the ranks as if at an inspection, the general stopped here and there, tapping a man on the shoulder or beckoning him out of the rear ranks. In most cases, without further parley, the individual thus selected was marched out into the centre of the road, where a small supplementary column was thus soon formed.... They evidently knew too well that their last hour had come, and it was fearfully interesting to see their different demeanours. One, already wounded, his shirt soaked with blood, sat down in the road and howled with anguish;....

85 Marx 1871a, p. 339.

> others wept in silence; two soldiers, presumed deserters, pale but collected, appealed to all the other prisoners as to whether they had ever seen them amongst their ranks; some smiled defiantly.... It was an awful thing to see one man thus picking out a batch of his fellow-creatures to be put to a violent death in a few minutes without further trial.... A few paces from where I stood, a mounted officer pointed out to General Gallifet a man and woman for some particular offence. The woman, rushing out of the ranks, threw herself on her knees, and, with outstretched arms implored mercy, and protested her innocence in passionate terms. The General waited for a pause, and then, with most impassible face and unmoved demeanour, said: 'Madame, I have visited every theatre in Paris; your acting will have no effect on me.' (*ce n'est pas la peine de jouer la comédie*).... I followed the General closely down the line, still a prisoner, but honoured with a special escort of two *chasseurs-à-cheval*, and endeavoured to arrive at what guided him in his selections. The result of my observations was that it was not a good thing on that day to be noticeably taller, dirtier, cleaner, older, or uglier than one's neighbour. One individual in particular struck me as probably owing his speedy release from the ills of this world to his having a broken nose on what might have been otherwise an ordinary face, and being unable from his height to conceal it. Over a hundred being thus chosen, a firing party told off, and the column resumed its marching, leaving them behind. In a few minutes afterwards, a dropping fire in our rear commenced and continued for over a quarter of an hour. It was the execution of these summarily convicted wretches.
>
> *The Daily News*, June 8, 1871[86]

Marx's final comments on the bourgeois repression – which Lissagaray estimated at 20,000 people killed, to which should be added the trials of 12,500 people (of whom some 10,000 were found guilty) and 4,000 deportations – and on the struggle for a general amnesty, appear in Chapter XXXVI of the English version of Lissagaray's *History of the Commune of 1871*.[87] Unfortunately, we cannot include them in this essay on account of their length.[88]

86 Lissagaray 1886, pp. 497–8; Lissagaray 1877, p. 214. Marx included a shortened version of this report as Note 1 in *The Civil War in France* (Marx 1871a, pp. 356–7).

87 Lissagaray 1886, pp. 459–66.

88 Lissagaray 1877, pp. 362–7.

Marx's Political Balance-Sheet of the Paris Commune

Both the French original and the English version close with a call on the workers to support their brothers who had fallen victim to bourgeois repression, but in the German version Marx closed the *History of the Commune* with this political balance-sheet:

> It is a truly disgraceful spectacle to see the pot-bellied Radicals call the 18th of March a criminal insurrection and ask: 'What has it left behind?'
>
> If that is indeed the case, then also the insurrection of 14 July 1789 was a crime, because it also had its executions (Launay, Flesselles) and because it was an even greater insurrection than that of 18 March 1871, for then the people attacked instead of being attacked. And yet the Radicals make out of the insurrection of 14 July 1789 one of their greatest days of glory. We ask only for a little logic from you, greedy, ungrateful bourgeoisie; the insurrection of 18 March 1871, like that of 14 July 1789, was a wake-up call to the despots.
>
> What has it left behind?
>
> A banner, the free commune; a well-established party, the Workers' Party [*die Arbeiterpartei*]. From now on, France is obliged to study the question and to recognise that there is no lasting republic with social progress, but through the reorganised Commune.
>
> From now on the workers no longer form an appendix of the Radical Party. The 18th of March has given them consciousness of their strength; the 18th of March has emancipated them. For the first time in our history, they have been able to take charge of their affairs. They will therefore appear clear and determined as soon as they are able to return to the light of the day.
>
> The notion of communalism is thus the idea, the workers' government [*die Mitregierung des Arbeiters*] is the fact in which the 18th of March culminates. This movement is therefore a revolution; that's why it has separated the water and the earth; that's why the slave owners think of it only with rage; that's why all the workers of the earth welcome it as a date of liberation.
>
> To be sure, the revolutionary party in France, attacked while it was still awakening, disorganised, inhibited by various elements, forced into a military struggle, failed to develop its ideas and its legions, and the revolutionaries are not so foolish as to see in this episode, gigantic as it was, the whole revolution. That struggle was just a prelude, an 'outpost engagement' as Bebel said. But the revolutionary party in France has left

an unforgettable example of initiative, boldness and courage. If it did not triumph, at least it showed the way. Even more: it trampled upon the chauvinist traditions which had crept into socialism; [and] it did not take foolish pride in denying its mistakes. Rather, it reveals them, so that they will serve as lessons for the future; so that the son does not have to follow once again the father's path.

Therefore, the author of this history, by saying the full truth without restraint, without sparing even the comrades, believes himself to be the most faithful and most respectful interpreter of the will of this revolution, whose defenders in the outposts said: 'We stand for humanity!'[89]

Marx's Addenda to Lissagaray's *History of the Commune of 1871* and *The Civil War in France*

To take stock of Marx's additions to Lissagaray's *History of the Commune of 1871*, it is necessary to set them against the background of his analysis in the Address of the General Council of the International Working Men's Association known as *The Civil War in France*, delivered on 30 May 1871, two days after the defeat of the Paris Commune. In the letter to Kugelmann written on 12 April 1871, while the Paris Commune was still in progress, Marx had argued that its aim could 'be no longer, as before, to transfer the bureaucratic military machine from one hand to another, but to *break* it, and that is essential for every real people's revolution on the Continent. And this is what our heroic Party comrades in Paris are attempting.'[90] In *The Civil War in France*, Marx returned to this idea, arguing that 'the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes'.[91]

89 Lissagaray 1877, pp. 368–9.

90 Marx and Engels 1971, p. 131, emphasis in the original.

91 Marx 1871a, p. 328. In a letter addressed to the translator of Lissagaray's *History* into German, Wilhelm Blos, dated 10 November 1877, Marx wrote: 'As regards the "*suppression de l'État*", an expression which Lissagaray himself will be altering in the 2nd French edition, the sense is no different from that expounded in my pamphlet on *The Civil War in France*. In short, you can translate it as "abolition (or suppression) of the class state [*Abschaffung* (*oder Unterdrückung*) *des Klassenstaats*]"' (Marx 1877, p. 288). The confrontation of this apparently revealing quote with the French original text is underwhelming, however, as it appears in a footnote dealing with a secondary issue: '*Il* [Jean-Baptiste Millière] *démontra, pièces en mains, dans le* Vengeur *qui avait remplacé le* Combat, *que, depuis de longues années, Jules Favre s'était rendu coupable de faux, de bigamie, de suppression d'état*' (Lissagaray 1876, p. 54, note 1), i.e.: 'He [Jean-Baptiste Millière] demonstrated, documents in hand, in the *Vengeur* which had replaced *Combat*, that, for many

In *The Civil War in France*, Marx enumerated the distinguishing traits of the Commune as a workers' government (i.e. a state on its way to disappear as an organ of repression) as opposed to a bourgeois state, even the most democratic one. The first distinctive characteristic of a workers' government is the armament of the people (militia): 'The first decree of the Commune, therefore, was the suppression of the standing army, and the substitution for it of the armed people … the standing army was to be replaced by a national militia, with an extremely short term of service'.[92] The second defining trait of a workers' government is the election of all public officials, revocable and provided with mandates: 'The Commune was formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town responsible and revocable at short terms. The majority of its members were naturally working men or acknowledged representatives of the working class.'[93] The third characteristic is the abolition of the separation of powers: 'The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time.'[94] The fourth is that public officials must receive salaries no higher than those of skilled workers: 'From the members of the Commune downwards, the public service had to be done at *workmen's wages*. The vested interests and the representation allowances of the high dignitaries of State disappeared along with the high dignitaries themselves.'[95] The fifth is the separation of church and state: 'Having once got rid of the standing army and the police, the physical force elements of the old Government, the Commune was anxious to break the spiritual force of repression, the "parson-power" by the disestablishment and disendowment of all churches as proprietary bodies. The priests were sent back to the recesses of private life, there to feed upon the alms of the faithful in imitation of their predecessors, the Apostles.'[96] The sixth defining trait of a workers' government is the gratuity, secularisation and autonomy of educational institutions: 'The whole of the educational institutions were opened to the people gratuitously, and at the same time cleared of all interference of

years, Jules Favre had been guilty of forgery, of bigamy, of suppression of the state'. In the German version there is no mention of the '*Abschaffung* (*oder Unterdrückung*) *des Klassenstaats*' (indeed, there is no mention of the *Klassenstaat* at all), and the footnote is translated as follows: '*Er wies im* Vengeur, *der auf den* Combat *folgte, mit Actenstücken in der Hand nach, daß sich Jules Favre seit langen Jahren der Fälschung, der Bigamie, der Unterschlagung von Staatsgeldern schuldig gemacht*' (Lissagaray 1877, p. 37, note 2), i.e. *suppression d'état* is rendered as 'embezzlement of state funds'.

92 Marx 1871a, p. 331.

93 Marx 1871a, p. 331.

94 Marx 1871a, p. 331.

95 Marx 1871a, p. 331; emphasis in the original.

96 Marx 1871a, pp. 331–2.

Church and State. Thus, not only was education made accessible to all, but science itself freed from the fetters which class prejudice and governmental force had imposed upon it.'[97] The seventh is the election and revocability of judges: 'The judicial functionaries were to be divested of that sham independence which had but served to mask their abject subservience to all succeeding governments to which, in turn, they had taken, and broken, the oaths of allegiance. Like the rest of the public servants, magistrates and judges were to be elective, responsible and revocable.'[98] And finally, a worker's government has to be organised also at the national level through assemblies of delegates, revocable and with imperative mandates: 'The communal regime once established in Paris and the secondary centres, the old centralized Government would in the provinces, too, have to give way to the self-government of the producers … each delegate to be at any time revocable and bound by the *mandat impératif* [formal instructions] of his constituents.'[99] As Stathis Kouvelakis has pointed out, this programme of armament of the people, election of all public officials, who moreover would be revocable and provided with imperative mandates, and a communal assembly provided with both legislative and executive power represented a radical break with parliamentarianism.[100]

Of the eight points itemised by Marx as features of a workers' government, some, like the separation of church and state or the creation of a people's militia, were democratic measures that the bourgeoisie had failed to carry out in its own revolutions or subsequently reversed, while others, like the abolition of the separation of powers, were characteristic of the government of a city under siege. Moreover, the Paris Commune did not socialise the means of production; it limited itself in the economic field to introducing some very partial reforms: the abolition of the nightwork of journeymen bakers, the prohibition of the employers' practice of reducing wages by levying fines on their workers under different pretexts, the surrender to associations of workmen of all closed workshops and factories, the closing of the pawnshops, etc. And yet, as we have seen, Marx regarded it as 'the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour'.[101] In other words, Marx stressed the *political* tasks that had to be carried out by the working class in order to establish a workers' government, from which the most radical economic measures would naturally follow, in striking contrast to some of his

97 Marx 1871a, p. 332.
98 Marx 1871a, p. 332.
99 Marx 1871a, p. 332.
100 Kouvélakis (ed.) 2021, p. 71.
101 Marx 1871a, p. 334.

disciples, who consider nationalisations as *the* defining criterion to determine whether a state is bourgeois or whether it is a workers' government. For Marx, the working class had first of all to smash the machinery of the bourgeois state and set up its own organs of class rule; only then '*National centralisation of the means of production* will become the national basis of a society composed of associations of free and equal producers, carrying on the social business on a common and rational plan'.[102]

Marx's masterful analysis of the Paris Commune in *The Civil War in France* certainly provides a strong theoretical perspective. However, it was finished on 30 May 1871. The Commune had only come into existence on 18 March and had finally been crushed just two days before *The Civil War in France*'s publication. Neither ink nor blood had had time to dry. When the ruling classes of Europe were demanding the heads of all the *communards*, and hunting down working-class women as *pétroleuses* (arsonists), Marx mounted a superb polemical defence. But these circumstances left little room for drawing up a sober balance-sheet, and criticisms had to be couched carefully.

In the Preface to the German edition of Lissagaray's book Marx portrayed the Paris Commune as a prelude to future social struggles, but he also reminded readers that it had ended in a bloodbath, adding: 'In such circumstances flattery is tantamount to betrayal.' This remark stressed once again his strong support for the Commune as expressed in *The Civil War in France*, but also that in 1876–7 he was prepared to air criticisms more strongly than was possible in the immediate aftermath of 1871. While he had previously concentrated on a defence of the Commune, in his addenda to Lissagaray's book Marx felt free to discuss the crucial difference between the conception of the Commune held by the Parisian masses, and that held by the Parisian bourgeoisie. The latter wanted to restore a municipal council, something which existed everywhere in France apart from Paris due to the capital's radical role in the Great French Revolution of 1789–93. The former wanted an 'autonomous Commune … to substitute for the representative lording it over his electorate'. In other words, the Parisian masses wanted working-class power to be embodied in the Commune, even if the name used still matched the official institution, whose bourgeois origins dated back to the Middle Ages. In his public pronouncement

102 Marx 1872, p. 136. Marx was pleased with the reception of *The Civil War in France*. Three editions were sold in two months and besides, he said, 'I have the honour to be at the present moment the best calumniated and the most menaced man of London.' According to the testimony of Adolf Hepner, the co-editor of the Leipzig *Volksstaat*, the paper of August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht, the German Social Democrats, after having disseminated the address on *The Civil War in France* in more than 4,000 copies in the *Volksstaat*, issued a separate edition of over 8,000 copies (Gerth 1958, pp. xiii, 218).

in *The Civil War in France*, written as the upholders of both conceptions who had survived 'Bloody Week' were being dragged off to the galleys in chains or hunted down, Marx did not bring out the difference between the administrative unit of the Commune and the organs of workers' power as sharply as he would in the addenda to Lissagaray's book.

The same point is echoed, in a slightly different way, in further paragraphs Marx added to the German version of Lissagaray's book. The French bourgeoisie had vanquished its feudal enemy thanks to the direct action of the Parisian *sans-culottes* between 1789 and 1793. Attempts to turn the clock back had again been thwarted by the Parisian masses in 1830 and 1848. In 1871, they were advancing their own programme. Significantly, Marx wrote that the Parisian masses did that through 'the Central Committee' of the National Guard, because this was effectively the armed working class. Again, Marx drew here a distinction between the municipal council (the Commune) and workers' power.

In the extensive section inserted by Marx to criticise the leaders of the Paris Commune, he delved into the question of revolutionary leadership using terms that would not have been out of place in Lenin's mouth, pointing out how the enormous potential power of the working class had 'always been squandered, diverted, annihilated … by a swarm of declaimers and sectarians … others who are only anxious to climb up the social ladder … [and] a bunch of blind hotheads…' Marx insisted that 'If a party needs wisdom, clarity, reason, leadership, it is the revolutionary party.'

Once again, freed from the burden of defensive polemic, Marx's true voice could come through clearly. *The Civil War in France* elided the difference between the Central Committee of the National Guard (which abdicated power to the Commune elected by pre-revolutionary franchise) and ascribed key features of the former to the latter (such as the election of representatives 'revocable at short terms', or the presence of a majority composed of 'working men, or acknowledged representatives of the working class'). In the addenda to Lissagaray's book Marx could write, 'I am not going to describe the ideal Commune, or the Commune as we would have wanted it, but the Commune as it was…' And that is exactly what he did, with a careful sifting of the various members elected.

This was followed by the paragraph which begins: 'The Commune has been called a working-class government. That is a big mistake.' This statement is in striking contrast to *The Civil War in France*, where Marx argued that the Paris Commune had been 'essentially a working class government, the product of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of

labour'.[103] His additions to Lissagaray's book do not contradict this analysis but offer a more nuanced picture: the Paris Commune was a workers' government in which the rule of the working class was actually mediated by its, socially and ideologically, mostly petit-bourgeois political representatives. It is possible to go even further and draw a distinction between the institution that Marx calls 'the Council of the Commune' meeting at the *Hôtel de Ville* (Town Hall) and the movement of which this was but one element, and often the weakest one. This wider movement also included the Central Committee of the National Guard Federation, the Federation's constituent parts, the regular mass assemblies and so on. Notably, Marx argued that the Council of the Commune made its 'most deadly mistake' when it decided to keep its proceedings secret, thus isolating itself from this broader popular movement.

Another subject which Marx was able to explore by expanding on Lissagaray's work is some of the internal debates of the Council of the Commune, and in particular the split between the majority and minority. Some of its most talented members were part of the minority. However, they objected to the very idea of acting as a leadership because they were trapped in what Marx calls their 'autonomist principle-prattle'. To walk out of the Council of the Commune when it was literally fighting for its life and 'the cannon ruled supreme' only compounded these errors.

Having been more critical in the addenda to Lissagaray's book than in *The Civil War in France*, Marx was still careful to draw a balanced balance-sheet. Although he now felt free to tell 'the full truth without restraint, without sparing even the comrades', he still upheld the experience of the Paris Commune as 'an unforgettable example of initiative, boldness and courage. If it did not triumph, at least it showed the way.'

The Second London Conference and the Resolution on the 'Political Action of the Working Class'

The Address of the General Council of the International Working Men's Association known as *The Civil War in France* was not Marx's last word on the Paris Commune. The lessons that Marx and his followers, on the one hand, and Bakunin and his followers, on the other, drew from the experience of the Paris Commune were the main cause of the split in the International Working Men's Association that took place shortly afterwards. Bakunin and his followers

103 Marx 1871a, p. 334.

opposed both the creation of a workers' party independent of and opposed to the bourgeois parties as well as to the seizure of power by the working class and the establishment of a workers' government. But as the historian of the Commune Jacques Rougerie has argued in his article on the International Working Men's Association and the workers' movement in Paris during the events of 1870–1, 'The International was also beginning, tending, by force of circumstances, to transform itself into a revolutionary "party." It was not given the time for it, but its history and its development – positively and negatively – carried a lot of weight in the decisions of the London Conference of 1871, then on those of the Congress of the Hague, in 1872'.[104]

Marx and Engels' positions on the question of the workers' party and the workers' government were embodied in two documents adopted by the International Working Men's Association. The first was Resolution IX, 'Political Action of the Working Class', adopted by the London Conference of the International held in September 1871.

After the defeat of the Paris Commune, the Blanquist refugees in London saw two of their own, Édouard Vaillant and Constant Martin, join the General Council of the International, which revived the tradition of an open alliance between Marxists and Blanquists that had already taken place after the revolution of 1848, only in this case it was reborn out of a common hostility to Bakunin and his followers. The second London conference of the International was a revelation in that respect, because it was on the basis of the Blanquist motion that Resolution (IX) on 'Political Action of the Working Class' was adopted.[105]

The second conference of the International was convened because the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War and then the repression of the Paris Commune made the celebration of an ordinary congress impossible.[106] At its meeting on 25 July 1871, the General Council, at Engels' suggestion, resolved to convene instead a closed conference of the International Working Men's Association. The motion was approved and the conference finally met in London from 16 to 23 September 1871. It was attended by 22 delegates with full rights and by ten delegates with a voice but no votes.

At the fifth session of the London Conference, on 20 September 1871, the Blanquist Édouard Vaillant moved a draft resolution, supported by Charles Longuet and Constant Martin, which read:

104 Rougerie 1972, p. 80.

105 Dommanget 1962, p. 553.

106 The proceedings of the second London conference were published in the second volume of the collection *La Première Internationale, recueil de documents* (Freymond (ed.) 1962–71b, pp. 145–244) and in Marx and Engels 1978f, pp. 641–748 (*Association internationale des travailleurs* 1871).

> In the presence of an unbridled reaction momentarily victorious which stifles by force any demand of socialist democracy and attempts to maintain by force the distinction between classes;
>
> The conference reminds the members of the [International Working Men's] Association that the political question and the social question are indissolubly united, that they are only two facets of one and the same question that the International has set out to resolve: the abolition of classes;
>
> The workers must recognise, no less than economic solidarity, the political solidarity which unites them and combine their forces, no less in the political than in the economic field, for the definitive triumph of their cause.[107]

The Bakuninist André Bastelica as well as Anselmo Lorenzo, the representative of the Spanish sections, tried to have this motion taken off the agenda, declaring that the Conference was incompetent to discuss it and that it had to be dealt with in a congress. On the other hand, two or Marx's followers at that time, Léo Frankel and Auguste Serraillier, submitted an amendment to the Vaillant motion which read:

> Considering:
>
> That the false translation of the original General Rules into different languages has been the cause of various interpretations that have been detrimental to the development of the International [Working Men's] Association;
>
> The conference reminds the members of the International that the political question and the social question are indissolubly united and that they are only two facets of one and the same question that the International Association has set out to resolve: the abolition of classes;
>
> They must therefore seize all the opportune occasions to strengthen the vindication of the social principles which are the basis and which constitute the real strength of the International Working Men's Association.[108]

In his intervention, Marx supported 'citizen Vaillant's proposal with the Frankel amendment, which consists of preceding it by a statement explaining the reason for this declaration, that is to say, stating that it is not today that

107 *Association internationale des travailleurs* 1871, pp. 682–3.
108 *Association internationale des travailleurs* 1871, pp. 696–7.

the [International Working Men's] Association asks that the workers engage in politics, but that it has always done so.'

Marx argued that 'in almost all countries, some internationalists, basing themselves on the truncated declaration of the Statutes voted at the Geneva Congress (1866), have made propaganda in favour of political abstention, that governments have been careful not to interrupt.' In France, this abstentionist policy had allowed Jules Trochu (the President of the Government of National Defence), Jules Favre (its vice-president and foreign minister), Ernest Picard (its minister of finance) and others to seize power on 4 September 1870, when the Second Empire was overthrown, the third French Republic was proclaimed and the 'Government of National Defence' set up. That same abstentionist policy had then enabled, on 18 March 1871, the day of the Commune uprising, 'to establish in Paris a dictatorial committee composed mainly of Bonapartists and intriguers who knowingly lost in inaction the first days of the revolution which they should have devoted to its consolidation'.[109]

Marx went on to argue that 'we must not believe that it is of little importance to have workers in the parliaments.' If the government stifled their voices and expelled them, the effect of these rigors and this intolerance was profound on the people, and if, on the contrary, 'like Bebel and Liebknecht, they can speak from that tribune, the whole world hears them; in one way or another, it is a great publicity for our principles.' Marx recalled that recently, during the Franco-Prussian War, 'when Bebel and Liebknecht took action against and during the war that was being waged in France, all of Germany was shaken by this struggle to release the working class from all responsibility in the face of what was happening, and even Munich, that city where revolutions were only made over the price of beer, engaged in large demonstrations to demand an end to the war.' Marx concluded by arguing that 'governments are hostile to us; we must respond to them by all possible means at our disposal. Putting workers in parliaments is all to the good for them, but we must choose the right men and not people like Tolain.'[110]

At the sixth session of the London Conference, on 21 September 1871, Engels spoke in support of Vaillant's motion, arguing that 'we must absolutely advise the workers to involve themselves in politics, because abstention is in contradiction, not only with the General Rules of the [International Working Men's] Association, but also with the needs of the socialist cause. The abstentionists in politics are those who logically condemn the efforts of the Paris Commune,

109 *Association internationale des travailleurs* 1871, p. 698.
110 *Association internationale des travailleurs* 1871, p. 699.

where, for the first time, the workers took into their hands, with the political lever, the real means of achieving the triumph of our principles.'[111]

In his speech, Engels launched a frontal attack on the concept of abstentionism and on its partisans. Absolute abstention from politics was impossible, he argued; taken literally it just meant the passive acceptance of the political *status quo*. The only question was *how* to get involved in politics.[112] According to him:

> The workers' party already exists as a political party in most countries. It is not up to us to ruin it by preaching abstention. The experience of real life and the political oppression imposed on them by existing governments – whether for political or social ends – force the workers to concern themselves with politics, whether they wish to or not. To preach abstention would be to push them into the arms of bourgeois politics. Especially in the aftermath of the Paris Commune, which placed the political action of the proletariat on the agenda, abstention is quite impossible.
>
> We seek the abolition of Classes. What is the means of achieving it? The political domination of the proletariat. And when everyone is agreed on that, we are asked not to get involved in politics! All abstentionists call themselves revolutionaries, even revolutionaries *par excellence*. But revolution is the supreme act of politics; whoever wants it must also want the means, political action, which prepares for it, which gives the workers the education for revolution and without which the workers will always be duped by the Favres and the Pyats the day after the struggle. But the politics which are needed are working-class politics; the workers' party must be constituted not as the tail of some bourgeois party, but as an independent party with its own objective, its own politics.
>
> The political freedoms, the right of assembly and association and the freedom of the press, these are our weapons – should we fold our arms and abstain if they seek to take them away from us? It is said that every political act implies recognition of the status quo. But when this status quo gives us the means of protesting against it, then to make use of these means is not to recognise the status quo.[113]

In the same session in which Engels gave this speech, Marx stated that the abstentionists were sectarians, though nobody was inclined to suspect their

111 *Association internationale des travailleurs* 1871, p. 704.
112 Engels 1871a; emphasis in the original.
113 Engels 1871b.

loyalty; they were sincere men but their position was a backward one. Marx pointed out that 'It is not only against governments that we want political action; it is also against bourgeois opposition.'[114]

Nikolai Utin, the representative of the Russian section of the International, together with the Swiss delegate Henri Perret (Secretary General of the *Comité fédéral romand* in Switzerland), the Belgian delegate Eugène Steens (a member of the Belgian *Conseil général*) and John Hales (a British trade unionist and since 1871 the General Secretary of the International Working Men's Association), submitted the following resolution: 'Recognizing the substance of the two resolutions, that is to say the necessity of the political action of the proletarian party, more than ever in the present circumstances, the Conference leaves to the General Council the task of giving the final wording to the two motions by Vaillant and Serraillier-Frankel.' Utin explained that he wanted the wording to be reinforced by the General Council and hoped that the draft resolution would come out more radical from its hands. Utin's motion was finally accepted by 10 votes in favour, 2 against and 4 abstentions, with three of the delegates absent from the session.[115]

In his report as representative from Germany, Marx recalled that

> In the Reichstag itself, Bebel and Liebknecht, the representatives of the German working class, were not afraid to declare that they were members of the International [Working Men's] Association and that they were protesting against the war for which they refused to vote any subsidy. The government did not dare to have them arrested in the middle of the session, it was only on their way out [of parliament] that the police seized them and took them to prison.
>
> During the Commune, the German workers did not cease, through the meetings and through the newspapers which belong to them, to affirm their solidarity with the revolutionaries of Paris. And when the Commune was defeated, they held a rally in Breslau which the Prussian police tried in vain to prevent; in this meeting, and in others in different cities of Germany, they acclaimed the Paris Commune. Finally, during the triumphal entry into Berlin of Emperor Wilhelm and his army, it was with the cry of *Vive la Commune!* that these victors were received by the people.[116]

114 *Association internationale des travailleurs* 1871, p. 716.

115 *Association internationale des travailleurs* 1871, pp. 709–12.

116 *Association internationale des travailleurs* 1871, p. 736.

After the conference, the General Council, at its meeting of 6 October 1871, delegated to several committees the editing of the resolutions of the conference. Of greatest importance was resolution Nº IX on the 'political action of the working class'. We have seen that Marx gained the opportunity to refine the text accepted by the conference; the resolution therefore summarises the Marxist conception according to which, for the socialist revolution to triumph, it is indispensable that the working class should secure its political independence through the creation of its own class party:

> Considering the following passage of the preamble to the Rules [and Administrative Regulations of the International Working Men's Association]:
>
> 'The economical emancipation of the working classes is the great end to which every political movement ought to be subordinate *as a means*;'
>
> That the Inaugural Address of the International Working Men's Association (1864) states: 'The lords of land and the lords of capital will always use their political privileges for the defence and perpetuation of their economical monopolies. So far from promoting, they will continue to lay every possible impediment in the way of the emancipation of labour … To conquer political power has therefore become the great duty of the working classes;'
>
> That the Congress of Lausanne (1867) has passed this resolution: 'The social emancipation of the workmen is inseparable from their political emancipation;'
>
> That the declaration of the General Council relative to the pretended plot of the French Internationals on the eve of the plebiscite (1870) says: 'Certainly by the tenor of our Statutes, all our branches in England, on the [European] Continent, and in America have the special mission not only to serve as centres for the militant organisation of the working class, but also to support, in their respective countries, every political movement tending towards the accomplishment of our ultimate end – the economical emancipation of the working class;'
>
> That false translations of the original Statutes [*Provisional Rules of the Association*] have given rise to various interpretations which were mischievous to the development and action of the International Working Men's Association;
>
> In presence of an unbridled reaction which violently crushes every effort at emancipation on the part of the working men, and pretends to maintain by brute force the distinction of classes and the political domination of the propertied classes resulting from it;

> Considering, that against this collective power of the propertied classes the working class cannot act, as a class, except by constituting itself into a political party, distinct from, and opposed to, all old parties formed by the propertied classes;
>
> That this constitution of the working class into a political party is indispensable in order to insure the triumph of the social Revolution and its ultimate end – the abolition of classes;
>
> That the combination of forces which the working class has already effected by its economical struggles [in the trade unions] ought at the same time to serve as a lever for its struggles against the political power of landlords and capitalists –
>
> The Conference recalls to the members of the *International*:
>
> That in the militant state of the working class, its economical movement and its political action are indissolubly united.[117]

The texts of the resolutions of the London Conference appeared as a brochure in English and then in translations in various press organs in Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, Spain, and Italy.[118] Wilhelm Liebknecht published the resolutions of the London Conference and the International's new statutes in the *Volksstaat* of 15 November 1871 and 10 February 1872 respectively.[119]

The Hague Congress and the Split in the International

At the meeting of the General Council held on 23 July 1872, Vaillant proposed to introduce resolution N° IX on the 'political action of the working class' among the items to be discussed at the next congress of the International Working Men's Association, which was due to convene in The Hague in September of that year. Vaillant argued that the resolution had 'produced a great sensation and most of the success of the International of late is due to that resolution, hence the Council ought to reaffirm it and adopt it as one of the fundamental rules of the society.' Engels seconded him, arguing that 'the same reasons that made us adopt it at the Conference still exist and we shall have to fight it out at the Congress'.[120]

117 International Working Men's Association 1871; emphasis in the original.
118 Katz 1992, p. 94.
119 Morgan 1965, p. 226.
120 General Council of the First International 1968, pp. 262–3.

The Resolution of the London Conference on 'Political Action of the Working Class' was then approved by the fifth and last Congress of the International Working Men's Association held in The Hague on 2–7 September 1872. This congress of the International was attended by 65 delegates from 12 countries holding 95 mandates as well as representing the General Council in London. It was the only congress attended by Marx and Engels, and it became famous primarily for two things.

First, because the Hague Congress expelled Bakunin and his follower James Guillaume, after determining that the *Alliance de la démocratie socialiste*, controlled by the anarchists, was a secret society whose aim was to seize control of the International.[121] In July 1872, two months before the International's Hague Congress, August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht, who had abstained when the war-credits were voted in the Reichstag in July 1870, entered on their two-year imprisonment after their sensational trial for 'High Treason'. Despite their problems, however, the *Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* sent a large delegation to the Hague: a group of nine German delegates attended the Congress as supporters of the General Council, and although Marx might just have succeeded in expelling Bakunin and his lieutenant Guillaume without their help, their presence naturally strengthened his position.[122]

The expulsion of Bakunin and Guillaume resulted in the split of the International. On 15 September 1872, only eight days after the closure of the congress in The Hague, a congress of the Jura federation, controlled by Bakunin's followers, assembled at Saint-Imier. Attended by sixteen delegates, among them Guillaume and Bakunin, the Saint-Imier congress declared null and void the resolutions passed at The Hague, in particular the expulsions, refused to recognise the 'authoritarian powers' of the General Council, and declared its determination to work for the establishment of a 'federative and free pact' between all the federations that wished to participate in it. The call of the Jura federation was answered by the Spaniards, who held their congress shortly afterwards.

Second, the Hague congress transferred the seat of the General Council from London to New York, where it would be led by Marx's follower Friedrich Sorge, in order to prevent its takeover by the London Blanquists, who, under the leadership of Édouard Vaillant, had recently acquired positions of power in the central authority of the International. The breakup of the alliance between Marxists and Blanquists at the Hague Congress contributed greatly to precipitating the decline of the organisation, which was consecrated by the transfer of

121 *Association internationale des travailleurs* 1873.

122 Morgan 1965, pp. 219, 226.

the seat of the General Council to New York. The International was unable to survive for long in the aftermath of the defeat of the Paris Commune, and was officially dissolved in 1876.[123]

Less usually remarked, but no less important, is the fact that the Hague congress also adopted Article 7a of the General Rules of the International Working Men's Association, which summarised the main ideas of the Resolution IX of the London Conference on 'Political Action of the Working Class'. On Friday, 6 September 1871, at the fifth session of the congress, the new paragraphs of the General Rules concerning the political action of the working class were submitted for discussion. A motion was submitted to insert, between paragraphs 7 and 8 of the General Rules, the paragraphs that later became Article 7a. The French exiled Blanquist Édouard Vaillant, the German Social Democrat Adolf Hepner, and the exiled Communard Charles Longuet spoke in favour of adding the new Article to the Rules (both Vaillant and Longuet were members of the General Council), while Guillaume spoke against it.

Vaillant stated:

> We must form a party of our own against all parties of the ruling and propertied classes without any connection with the bourgeois classes; even in the Inaugural Address political action of the working class was recommended, and the General Council has never turned from this duty; the London Conference understood this truth perfectly well and assumed the responsibility for the Commune, and the proletarians everywhere adhered to [the Commune].[124]

Hepner argued that the German workers could not 'look on complacently as a revolution is made in France' because 'The international movement knows no political abstention.' Against the 'anti-authoritarians' who blamed the 'General

123 Katz 1992, pp. 135–7. Édouard Vaillant and his fellow Blanquist refugees in London laid out their differences with Marx and his followers in two brochures edited in London: *Internationale et Révolution: A propos du Congrès de la Haye* (November 1872), and *Aux Communeux* (June 1874) signed by the '*groupe La Commune Révolutionnaire*'. Both documents talked about the need to establish, after the seizure of power, '*la dictature du prolétariat*', but as Engels argued in his reply to the second pamphlet, the Blanquists understood by this expression something different than the Marxists: 'Since Blanqui regards every revolution as a *coup de main* by a small revolutionary minority, it automatically follows that its victory must inevitably be succeeded by the establishment of a dictatorship – not, it should be well noted, of the entire revolutionary class, the proletariat, but of the small number of those who accomplished the coup and who themselves are, at first, organised under the dictatorship of one or several individuals' (Engels 1874, p. 13).

124 Gerth 1958, p. 217.

Council for its use of excessive authority', Hepner went on to argue that the German workers believed 'that the Commune was overthrown mainly for want of authority and its usage'.[125]

Guillaume argued that the Bakuninists 'do not wish to mix-up with present-day governments, in parliamentarism; we wish to overthrow [*aplatir*] all governments.' They were therefore actually not 'abstentionists, an ill-chosen phrase of Proudhon's' but rather 'adherents of a definite policy, of social revolution, of the destruction of bourgeois politics, of the state.' The followers of Bakunin therefore rejected 'the seizure of political power in the state' and demanded instead 'the complete destruction of the state as the expression of political power'.[126]

Longuet argued that, when the defeat of Sedan brough down the Second Empire, 'had we been better organized as a political party, Jules Favre and his like would not have gained control and the Commune would not have been proclaimed and victorious in Paris alone, but also in Berlin and elsewhere.' The Paris 'Commune fell for want of organization, of political organization'. Guillaume's collectivism could not be realised in practice 'without some centralization of forces'. Longuet's conclusion was that 'because of the economic struggle the workers must organize into a political party, lest nothing remain of the International, and Guillaume, whose master is Bakunin, cannot belong to the I.W.A. while holding such views'.[127]

The motion to add a new article to the General Rules was finally approved at the Hague Congress by thirty-six votes to five, with eight abstentions.[128]

Article 7a of the General Rules of the International Working Men's Association reads as follows:

> In its struggle against the collective power of the propertied classes, the working class cannot act as a class except by constituting itself into a political party, distinct from, and opposed to, all old parties formed by the propertied classes.
>
> This constitution of the working class into a political party is indispensable in order to insure the triumph of the social revolution, and of its ultimate end, the abolition of classes.

125 Gerth 1958, pp. 217–18.
126 Gerth 1958, p. 219.
127 Gerth 1958, pp. 219–20.
128 Gerth 1958, pp. 216–20, 251, 285–6.

> The combination of forces which the working class has already effected by its economical struggles ought, at the same time, to serve as a lever for its struggles against the political power of its exploiters.
>
> The lords of land and the lords of capital will always use their political privileges for the defence and perpetuation of their economical monopolies, and for the enslavement of labour. The conquest of political power has therefore become the great duty of the working class.[129]

This is exactly the same idea contained in Marx's addenda to Lissagaray's book, particularly in his political balance-sheet of the Paris Commune, where Marx asks: 'What has it left behind?' and answers: 'A banner, the free commune; a well-established party, the Workers' Party [*die Arbeiterpartei*].'

The German Edition of Lissagaray's Book and Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme*

The cycle of revolts in France dating from 1789 (1830, 1848 and finally 1871) came to a temporary end after the Paris Commune, and, after the split and eventual dissolution of the International Working Men's Association, the practical task of building mass workers' parties in the individual countries encouraged a different focus. After the repression of the Commune, the centre of the international workers' movement shifted, not to the United States as Marx and Engels had hoped in The Hague, but to Germany. This is the reason why from 1876 to 1877 Marx was heavily involved in overseeing the translation of Lissagaray's book into German: Marx's addenda and his reference to 'the Workers' Party' were also due to the intended audience for the German version.

In order to understand the reasons for Marx's involvement in 1876–7 in the German translation of Lissagaray's *History of the Commune of 1871* we must recall Marx's attitude towards the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany (*Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands*, SAPD), which had been formed shortly before, at a congress held in the city of Gotha in May 1875. This party, the predecessor of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, SPD), resulted from the fusion of the Lassallean General German Workers Association (*Allgemeinen Deutschen Arbeiterverein*, ADAV) with August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht's Social Democratic Worker's Party (*Sozialdemokratischen Arbeiterpartei*, SDAP). Both parties had moved closer

129 International Working Men's Association 1872, p. 201; for alternative translations, see Gerth 1958, pp. 216–17 and p. 251.

together with the unification of Germany after the Franco-Prussian War. Marx was concerned about the influence of the Lassalleans' strategy of transforming the semi-absolutist German state into a vehicle for radical social change, but also about the strategy of his purported disciples led by Bebel and Liebknecht, who were known as the 'Eisenachers' because their founding congress, in which they adopted a programme which called for the establishment of a 'Free People's State' (*Freie Volksstaat*), took place in the city of Eisenach in 1869.

The Eisenachers understood by a 'Free People's State' a completely democratic state, including universal suffrage for both men and women as well as a parliamentary system of representation. They also understood it to mean a republic, but they did not use that term because of the dangers this would involve within the German Empire (*Deutsches Reich*). 'Free People's State' was a euphemism for republic. The Eisenach programme of 1869 called for the extension of universal, direct, and secret manhood suffrage in all elections for parliament, state diets, and municipal bodies; daily allowances for elected representatives; the introduction of direct legislation by the people by means of initiative and referendum; the abolition of juridical and political privileges derived from class, property, birth, and confession; the establishment of a people's militia to replace the standing army; the separation of the church from the state and of the schools from the churches; obligatory education in primary schools and free instruction in all public educational institutions; the independence of the courts and the establishment of industrial courts with juries and free legal counsel; and, finally, the abolition of the restrictive laws on the press and association.[130]

In many respects the party created at the Gotha congress was a model workers' party. It had a real mass-base. At the unification congress held in Gotha from 22 to 27 May 1875, only those members who had paid the last quarter's dues for any of the two fractions were represented: on the part of the Lassalleans there were 73 delegates with 15,322 votes; on the part of the Eisenachers, 56 delegates with 9,121 votes. At the second congress held in Gotha from 19 to 23 August 1876, the 98 delegates already represented a total of 38,254 members from 291 locals, a sizable increase in membership over the 24,443 members of 1875.[131] The party had a tried and trusted leadership, which had already endured imprisonment for upholding their ideals and would soon have to go underground or into exile in 1878. Its main leader, August Bebel, was a worker who had risen through the ranks and would soon become the embodiment of the class-conscious worker who devoted his entire life to the emancipation of his class from wage

130 *Allgemeinen Deutschen Arbeiterverein* 1947, pp. 121–2.

131 Mehring 1913, pp. 89, 104.

slavery.[132] The party adopted both a programme and statutes at its first congress, and those statues did not remain a dead letter but were applied in practice: the members actually had the right to form tendencies and to defend their views in the party publications.[133] The party organised annual congresses, at which the delegates elected by the members had the right to choose the party leadership and to control its finances, and whose proceedings (which included the actual debates and not just the resolutions) were published in book form in order to involve as far as possible the working class in the party debates.[134] This tradition had to be suspended when the party was driven underground under Bismarck's Anti-Socialist Laws of 1878–90, but was resumed as soon as it became possible for it to hold again congresses on German soil.[135] The SPD created a mass trade-union movement and a mass working-women movement virtually from scratch, though these were soon at loggerheads with each other due to the gradual formation of a union bureaucracy.[136] But back in 1875, the party's main deficiency was its programmatic weakness, which is the reason why Marx and Engels focused their criticisms on that particular point.

In his *Marginal Notes on the Programme of the German Worker's Party* of 1875 Marx criticised almost everything that the Eisenachers believed in, for Marx denounced not merely the Lassallean points of the new programme, but just as vigorously the endorsement of political democracy, which is a form of bourgeois class rule. In a crucial passage, Marx observed that

> Its political demands contain nothing beyond the old democratic litany familiar to all: universal suffrage, direct legislation, popular rights, a people's militia, etc. They are a mere echo of the bourgeois People's Party, of the League of Peace and Freedom. They are all demands which, insofar as they are not exaggerated in fantastic presentation, have already been *implemented*. Only the state to which they belong does not lie within the borders of the German Empire, but in Switzerland, the United States, etc.

132 Bebel 1912.

133 See *Die Organisation der deutschen Arbeiterpartei* in *Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* 1875.

134 *Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* 1876.

135 The proceedings of the party congresses held by what in 1890 became the SPD (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*) are available online as *Protokolle über die Verhandlungen der Parteitage der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands* (<http://library.fes.de/parteitage/index-pt-1890.html>).

136 Gaido and Frencia 2018.

> This sort of 'state of the future' is a *present-day state*, although existing outside the 'framework' of the German Empire.[137]

According to Marx's criticism, the programme confused the whole question of socialism's final goals, for it tacitly implied that the party sought nothing more than the achievement of a democratic republic. Marx did not deny that the socialists had to aim for the democratic republic, but only as a transitional stage to the communist society. Thus, his attack on the 'old democratic litany' had been preceded by an explanation of the nature of the whole transitional period:

> Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but *the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*.[138]

The expression 'dictatorship of the proletariat' does not appear in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848; Marx employed it for the first time in his book *The Class Struggles in France, 1848–1850*, written in 1850, and its origins can be traced back to the massacre of 3,000 Parisian workers by the French bourgeoisie in the so-called 'June Days' (*journées de Juin*) of 1848.[139] Marx had therefore been postulating the need for a transitional stage of dictatorship of the proletariat ever since 1850, and indeed he considered it the cornerstone of his political theory,[140] but it was Engels who made the connection between the

137 Marx 1875, p. 93; emphasis in the original.

138 Marx 1875, p. 93; emphasis in the original.

139 'The Paris proletariat was *forced* into the June insurrection by the bourgeoisie. This sufficed to mark its doom. Its immediate, avowed needs did not drive it to engage in a fight for the forcible overthrow of the bourgeoisie, nor was it equal to this task. The *Moniteur* had to inform it officially that the time was past when the republic saw any occasion to bow and scrape to its illusions, and only its defeat convinced it of the truth that the slightest improvement in its position remains a *Utopia within* the bourgeois republic, a Utopia that becomes a crime as soon as it wants to become a reality. In place of its demands, exuberant in form, but petty and even bourgeois still in content, the concession of which it wanted to wring from the February republic, there appeared the bold slogan of revolutionary struggle: *Overthrow of the bourgeoisie! Dictatorship of the working class!*' (Marx 1850, p. 69; emphasis in the original).

140 In a letter to Joseph Weydemeyer dated 5 March 1852, Marx wrote: 'Now as for myself, I do not claim to have discovered either the existence of classes in modern society or the struggle between them. Long before me, bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this struggle between the classes, as had bourgeois economists their economic anatomy. My own contribution was 1. to show that the *existence of classes* is merely

Paris Commune and the dictatorship of the proletariat explicit in his introduction to the 1891 edition of *The Civil War in France*, where he wrote: 'Of late, the Social-Democratic philistine has once more been filled with wholesome terror at the words: Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Well and good, gentlemen, do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.'[141]

In a letter to Bebel of 18–28 March 1875, Engels, along with many points similar to those in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, scornfully lampooned the 'host of somewhat muddled and *purely democratic demands*' which, he assumed, the Eisenachers had included in the programme to counter the Lassallean ideas.[142] Engels centred his criticism on the idea of the 'free state', with the recommendation that all talk about the 'state', the 'people's state', or the 'free state' be dropped from socialist programmes, because all political structures are the instruments of class rule. In one of the crucial passages, Engels explained this to Bebel as follows:

> Now, since the state is merely a transitional institution of which use is made in the struggle, in the revolution, to keep down one's enemies by force, it is utter nonsense to speak of a free people's state; so long as the proletariat still *makes use* of the state, it makes use of it, not for the purpose of freedom, but of keeping down its enemies and, as soon as there can be any question of freedom, the state as such ceases to exist. We would therefore suggest that *Gemeinwesen* [community] be universally substituted for *state*; it is a good old German word that can very well do service for the French '*Commune*'.[143]

If Engels' exposition very neatly encapsulated the Marxist theory of the state, it also struck at the very heart of the Eisenachers' political traditions. Just like Marx in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Engels asked them to dump their commitment to the 'People's state' as a final goal of the socialist movement, and thus to rethink the whole matter of immediate, transitional, and final goals. Beyond that, with his reference to the Commune, he had given a

bound up with *certain historical phases in the development of production*; 2. that the class struggle necessarily leads to the *dictatorship of the proletariat*; 3. that this dictatorship itself constitutes no more than a transition to the *abolition of all classes* and to a *classless society*' (Marx 1852, pp. 62, 65; emphasis in the original).

141 Engels 1891, p. 191.

142 Engels 1875, p. 70; emphasis in the original.

143 Engels 1875, p. 71; emphasis in the original.

specific suggestion about what would be appropriate as a slogan to define the final goal.

Like Marx, Engels made it amply clear that for socialists a democratic republic could only be a transitional or intermediary goal on the road to the final socialist society. These distinctions had to be clear, Marx and Engels believed, if socialists were ever to achieve an ideological foundation that would distinguish them from bourgeois democrats and guide them in their role as the leaders of the working class.

Two tasks were involved in Engels' recommendations; one negative, the other positive. First of all, they had to omit all references to the 'People's state' as the political goal of the workers' movement, because socialism would have no use for the state in any form, and because the 'People's state' embodied the aims of the bourgeois democrats, and therefore it could be only a transitional demand for the workers' party. Engels also advised that instead of the 'People's state', the socialists think in terms of the Commune as the final goal of the workers' movement, because the Commune had not been a state, and because, due to its working-class character, it had embarked on a socialist course.[144] It is this same idea that Marx expressed in his addenda to Lissagaray's book, where he argued that, 'The notion of communalism is thus the idea, the workers' government [*die Mitregierung des Arbeiters*] is the fact in which the 18th of March culminates.'

Conclusion

Marx's addenda to Lissagaray's *History of the Commune of 1871* contribute to concretising his analysis of the Paris Commune as the first attempt to create a workers' government. They describe the background to the Parisian workers' uprising in the political and social conditions of the Second French Empire and in the brutal circumstances of military defeat in the Franco-Prussian War and the siege of Paris. They also show why the communal idea became the focal point of the popular aspirations in the capital, whose inhabitants had been deprived of local self-government for eighty years. While praising their bravery and internationalism, Marx sharply criticised the inadequacy of the leaders of the Paris Commune, including those of the Minority after the split in the Commune Council. Marx explained those weaknesses by the lack of democratic rights, which deprived the working class of the opportunity to develop its class consciousness and organisation – a shortcoming which manifested itself

144 Lidtke 1966, pp. 47–50.

in the incipient development of the International Working Men's Association. Accordingly, Marx offered a nuanced picture of the Commune as a working-class government, showing how, even after the workers had smashed the state apparatus of the bourgeoisie in the capital, their own class rule was still mediated by its socially and ideologically still mostly petit-bourgeois political representatives.

In the final chapters of Lissagaray's book Marx added a poignant description of the brutality of the bourgeois repression that followed the defeat of the Paris Commune, which unfortunately we had to leave out for reasons of space. But perhaps the most interesting aspect of his additions is Marx's political balance-sheet of the Commune experience. Marx argued that, even though it was defeated, the Commune bequeathed to the working class an indelible legacy: the idea that the workers had to organise themselves in their own party and, after smashing the bourgeois state, set up a workers' government in order to be 'able to take charge of their own affairs'. As subsequently elaborated in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, this perspective implied that the workers' party had to go beyond the democratic republic, which was a form of bourgeois class rule, and strive, after 'a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but *the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*', for the replacement of the state by the Commune, as the final goal of the workers' movement. The Paris Commune had shown the workers the political path to follow in order to achieve their own liberation: 'that's why', Marx concluded, 'all the workers of the earth welcome it as a date of liberation.'

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