

The Bakunin-Marx split in the 1st International

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Chapter Thirteen: The International at Its Zenith

3. Bakunin's Agitation

The third congress of the International took place in Brussels from the 6th to the 13th of September, 1868.

It was better attended than any other congress either before or afterwards, but it was strongly local in character, more than half of those present being from Belgium. About one-fifth of the delegates came from France. Eleven delegates represented England, six of them being members of the General Council, including Eccarius, Jung, Lessner and the trade unionist Lucraft. Eight delegates were present from Switzerland but from Germany only three, including Moses Hess of the Cologne section. Schweitzer had received an official invitation but was unable to attend owing to the fact that legal business required his presence in Germany. Instead he sent a message declaring the agreement of the Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein with the aims of the International and explaining that formal affiliation was prevented only by the anti-combination laws of Germany. Italy and Spain sent one representative each.

The more vigorous life of the International in the fourth year of its existence made itself very definitely felt in the proceedings of the congress. The resistance which the Proudhonists had offered to trade unionism and strikes at the Geneva and Lausanne congresses had almost turned into its contrary; yet they still clung to their old ideas of "free credit" and the "exchange bank," and succeeded in securing the adoption of an academic resolution in their favour although Eccarius demonstrated the practical impossibility of these Proudhonist remedies on the basis of English experience, whilst Hess demonstrated their theoretical untenableness on the basis of Marx's reply to Proudhon twenty years earlier.

In the "property question" the French delegates suffered complete eclipse. At the proposal of de Paepe a long resolution on the subject was adopted demanding that a well-organized system of society should take over and administer the mines and the railways in the interests of the whole of society, i.e., a new State based on canons of justice, and that until that time they should be run by companies of workers affording the necessary guarantees to society as a whole. The land and the forests were also to be taken over by the State and entrusted to similar companies of workers offering the same guarantees. And finally, all canals, roads, telegraphs, and in short all the means of transport and communication were to become the common property of society as a whole. The French delegates protested violently against this "primitive communism," but all they could secure was an agreement that the next congress, which it was decided should take place in Basle, should discuss the question anew.

We have Marx's word that he had no part in drawing up the resolutions of the Brussels congress, but he was not dissatisfied with the proceedings. First of all the congress followed the example of the Hamburg and Nuremberg congresses and thanked him in the name of the international proletariat for his scientific work on its behalf, a fact which afforded him both personal and political satisfaction, and secondly the attack launched by the French section in London

against the General Council was repulsed. However, a resolution proposed by the Geneva section and adopted by the congress to the effect that threatening wars should be warded off by general strikes, by a general strike of the peoples, he described as “nonsense,” but he approved of a decision to break off relations with the League for Peace and Freedom, which held its second congress a little while later in Berne. The League proposed an alliance to the International, but it received the terse answer from Brussels that there seemed no obvious reason for its continued existence and that the best thing it could do would be to liquidate itself and advise its members to join the various sections of the International.

The idea of this alliance was supported chiefly by Michael Bakunin, who had been present at the first congress of the League for Peace and Freedom in Geneva and had joined the International a few months before the Brussels congress. When the International rejected his proposal for an alliance between the two organizations he did his best to persuade the Berne congress of the League for Peace and Freedom to advocate the destruction of all States and the establishment on the ruins of a federation of free productive cooperatives of all countries. However, he was in the minority at the congress of the League also, together with Johann Philipp Becker and others, and with this minority he then founded the International Alliance of Socialist Democracy. This body was to join the International without reservation in order to work within it to further the study of all political and philosophic questions on the basis of the great principle of the general and moral equality of all human beings throughout the world.

The coming of the Alliance was announced by Becker in the September number of *Der Vorbote* and its aim was declared to be the formation of sections of the International in France, Italy and Spain and wherever it had influence, but it was three months later, on the 15th of December, 1868, that Becker formally requested the General Council to accept the Alliance into the International, and in the meantime this request had been made to and rejected by the French and Belgian Federal Councils. A week later, on the 22nd of December, Bakunin wrote to Marx from Geneva: “My dear friend, I understand more clearly than ever now how right you were to follow the great path of economic revolution, inviting us to go with you and condemning those of us who frittered away our energies in the by-paths of partly national and occasionally wholly political ventures. I am now doing what you have been doing for the last twenty years. Since my solemn and public breach with the bourgeoisie at the Berne congress I know no other society and no other environment than the world of the workers. My Fatherland is now the International, to whose prominent founders you belong. You see therefore, my dear friend, that I am your pupil, and I am proud of it. So much for my attitude and my personal opinions.” There is no reason to doubt the honesty of these assurances.

A rapid and fundamental grasp of the relations between the two men can be gained from a comparison between Marx and Proudhon made several years later by Bakunin at a time when he was already in violent opposition to Marx: “Marx is a serious and profound economic thinker and he has the tremendous advantage over Proudhon of really being a materialist. Despite all his efforts to free himself from the traditions of classical idealism, Proudhon remained an incorrigible idealist all his life, swayed at one moment by the Bible and the next by Roman law (as I told him two months before he died) and always a metaphysician to his fingertips. His great misfortune was that he had never studied natural science and never adopted its methods. He possessed sound instincts and they fleetingly showed him the correct path, but, misled by the bad or idealist habits of his intellect, he fell back again and again into his old errors. Thus Proudhon became a permanent contradiction, a powerful genius and a revolutionary thinker who fought ceaselessly

against the illusions of idealism but never succeeded in defeating them for good.” Thus Bakunin on Proudhon.

He then proceeded to describe the character of Marx as it appeared to him: “As a thinker Marx is on the right path. He has set up the principle that all religious, political and legal developments in history are not the cause but the effects of economic developments. That is a great and fruitful idea, but not all the credit for it is due to him. Many others before him had an inkling of it and even expressed it in part, but in the last resort credit is due to him for having developed the idea scientifically and having made it the basis of his whole economic teachings. On the other hand, Proudhon understood and appreciated the idea of freedom better than Marx. When not engaged in inventing doctrines and fantasies, Proudhon possessed the authentic instinct of the revolutionary; he respected Satan and proclaimed anarchy. It is quite possible that Marx will develop an even more reasonable system of freedom than did Proudhon, but he lacks Proudhon’s instinct. As a German and a Jew, he is authoritarian from head to heels.” So much for Bakunin on Marx.

The conclusion which he drew for himself from this comparison was that he incorporated the higher unity of both these systems. He thought he had developed the anarchist system of Proudhon, freed it from all doctrinaire, idealist and metaphysical dress, and given it a basis of materialism in science and of social economics in history, but he was sadly deceiving himself. He developed far beyond Proudhon, possessing a far wider European education and understanding Marx far better, but unlike Marx he had neither gone through the school of German philosophy thoroughly, nor closely studied the class struggles of the Western European peoples. And above all, his ignorance of economics was even more damaging to him than ignorance of natural science had been to Proudhon. This deficiency in Bakunin’s education was due to the fact that his revolutionary activities had caused him to spend many of the best years of his life in Saxon, Austrian and Russian prisons and in the icy wastes of Siberia, but as honourable as this explanation is, it did not make the deficiency any the less serious.

The “Inner Satan” was at once his strength and weakness, and what he meant with this favourite expression of his has been explained aptly and in noble words by the famous Russian critic Bielinsky: “Michael is often guilty and sinful, but there is something in him which outweighs all his deficiencies – that is the eternally active principle which lives deep within his spirit.” Bakunin was a thoroughly revolutionary character and like Marx and Lassalle he possessed the gift which caused men to listen to his voice. It was no mean achievement for a penniless fugitive with nothing but his indomitable will to have laid the basis of the international working-class movement in a number of European countries, in Spain, Italy and Russia. However, it is only necessary to mention these countries in order to realize the difference between him and Marx. Both men observed the approaching revolution, but whereas Marx realized that the industrial proletariat, which he had studied in Germany, France and England, was the backbone of the revolution, Bakunin thought to snatch the victory with the masses of the declassed youth, the peasantry and even the slum proletariat. Although he recognized Marx’s superiority as a scientific thinker, in his own actions he fell back again and again into errors which were typical of “the revolutionaries of past generations.” He accepted his fate and consoled himself with the reflection that although science might be the compass of life, it was not life itself and only life could create real things and beings.

It would be folly and at the same time an injustice both to Marx and Bakunin to judge their relations solely on the basis of the irreconcilable quarrel in which these ended. It is of far more

value politically, and particularly psychologically, to trace how they were drawn to each other again and again only to fall asunder throughout the course of thirty years. Both began their revolutionary careers as Young Hegelians and Bakunin was also one of the founders of the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*. When the breach took place between Marx and Ruge, Bakunin supported Marx against his old patron, but later on when he was able to see at first hand in Brussels what Marx meant by communist propaganda he was horrified, and a few months later he enthusiastically supported Herwegh's adventurous volunteer crusade into Germany only to realize the folly of the venture and acknowledge his error openly.

Soon afterwards, in the summer of 1848, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* accused him of being a tool of the Russian government, but its subsequent reparation for an error into which it had been led by two independent sources was magnanimous enough to satisfy Bakunin completely. Marx and Bakunin met again in Berlin and renewed their old friendship, and when Bakunin was expelled from Prussia the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* championed his cause energetically. His subsequent Pan-Slav agitation came in for severe criticism, but an introductory remark declared, "Bakunin is our friend," pointed out that he was acting from democratic motives and granted that his self-deception in the Slav question was very understandable. And for the rest, Engels, who was the author of this article, was wrong in his chief objection to Bakunin's propaganda, for the Slav peoples then under Austrian domination have since proved that they did in fact possess the historical future which Engels denied them. Bakunin's revolutionary participation in the Dresden insurrection was appreciated by Marx and Engels sooner and more enthusiastically than by anyone else.

Bakunin was taken prisoner during the retreat from Dresden and twice sentenced to death, first by a Saxon and then by an Austrian court-martial. In both cases the sentence was commuted to lifelong hard labour and in the end he was extradited to Russia where he spent many terrible years in the fortress of St. Peter-Paul. During his incarceration an idiotic Urquhartite again brought forward the exploded accusation that Bakunin was an agent of the Russian government and declared in an article in *The Morning Advertiser* that he was in fact not in prison at all. The same paper was then compelled to publish letters of protest from Herzen, Mazzini, Ruge and Marx. An unfortunate coincidence was the fact that Bakunin's slanderer was also called Marx and this became known to a few people although he obstinately refused to abandon his public anonymity. This coincidence was later exploited by the sham revolutionary Herzen to launch a shameful intrigue. In 1857 Bakunin was sent from the St. Peter-Paul fortress to Siberia and in 1861 he succeeded in making his escape over Japan and the United States to London where Herzen persuaded him that Marx had denounced him in the English press as a Russian spy during his imprisonment. This was the beginning of that infamous scandal-mongering which caused much of the trouble between the two men.

Bakunin had been completely isolated from European life for over a decade and it is therefore understandable that on his arrival in London he first sought contact with Russian fugitives of the Herzen type, though fundamentally he had little in common with them. Even in his Pan-Slavism, as far as it is possible to give his aims such a name, Bakunin always remained a revolutionary, whereas Herzen was in reality playing the game of Tsarism under a mildly liberalist mask with his attacks on the "degenerate West" and his mystic cult of the Russian village community. It is nothing against Bakunin that he maintained friendly personal relations with Herzen up to the latter's death, for Herzen had been of assistance to him in his youthful troubles. The political breach between the two was brought about by Bakunin in 1866 in a letter to Herzen reproaching

him for wanting a social transformation without a political one and for being prepared to forgive the State everything provided it left the Russian village community intact, because this was the basis of Herzen's hopes for the regeneration not only of Russia and the Slav countries, but of the whole world. Bakunin subjected this fantasy to annihilating criticism.

However, after his successful flight from Siberia he stayed in Herzen's house and was thus kept from any contact with Marx. Despite this fact he translated *The Communist Manifesto* into Russian and secured its publication in Herzen's *Kolokol*. This was typical of him.

During Bakunin's second stay in London, at the time when the International was founded, Marx broke the ice and visited him. He was able to assure Bakunin truthfully that far from having been the originator of the slander, he had expressly opposed it. After this explanation the two parted as friends. Bakunin was enthusiastically in favour of the plan for an international working-class organization, and on the 4th of November Marx wrote to Engels: "Bakunin sends you his greetings. He left for Italy to-day, where he is now living (Florence). I must say that he impressed me favourably, more so than formerly ... On the whole he is one of the few people I have met during the past sixteen years who have progressed and not retrogressed."

The enthusiasm which Bakunin felt for the cause of the International did not last very long and his stay in Italy soon awakened "the revolutionary of a past generation" in him. He had chosen Italy to live in on account of its agreeable climate and its cheapness, but also for political reasons and because both France and Germany were closed to him. He regarded the Italians as the natural allies of the Slavs in the struggle against Austrian oppression, and whilst he was still in Siberia the exploits of Garibaldi had stirred his imagination. His first conclusion from these exploits was that the revolutionary movement was once again resurgent. In Italy he found numerous political secret societies, a declassed intelligentsia prepared to plunge at a moment's notice into all sorts of conspiratorial adventures, a mass of peasants always on the verge of starvation, and finally an eternally seething slum proletariat. This latter was particularly strongly represented by the Lazzaroni of Naples, where Bakunin went to live after a short stay in Florence. These classes appeared to him as the real driving forces of the revolution and he regarded Italy as the country in which the social revolution was probably nearest, though he was soon compelled to recognize his error. Mazzini's propaganda was still the dominant factor in Italy and Mazzini was an opponent of socialism. The sole aim of his vague religious battle-cries and of his strictly centralized movement was to secure a united bourgeois republic.

During the years he spent in Italy Bakunin's revolutionary agitation took on a more definite form. Owing to his lack of theoretical knowledge, his surplus of intellectual agility and his impetuous desire for action, he was always very strongly under the influence of his environment. The politico-religious dogmatism of Mazzini drove Bakunin to stress his own atheism and anarchism and his denial of all State authority. And on the other hand, the revolutionary traditions of those classes which he regarded as the pioneers of the general transformation of society greatly influenced his own inclination to indulge in secret conspiracies and local insurrections. Bakunin therefore founded a revolutionary socialist secret society which was composed chiefly of Italians in the beginning and aimed at combating "the disgusting bourgeois rhetoric of Mazzini and Garibaldi," but which soon extended its influence internationally.

In the autumn of 1867 he moved to Geneva, where he first tried to influence the League for Peace and Freedom in favour of his secret society, and when he failed to do so he did his best to secure the acceptance of its affiliation to the International, an organization about which he had not bothered his head for four years.

4. The Alliance of Socialist Democracy

Marx continued to harbour feelings of friendship for the old revolutionary Bakunin and he opposed various attacks which were made or planned against Bakunin amongst his, Marx's, immediate circle.

The originator of these attacks was Sigismund Borkheim, an honest democrat to whom Marx was indebted in connection with the Vogt affair and other matters. Borkheim had two weaknesses: first of all he thought himself a brilliant writer, which he was not, and secondly he suffered from an eccentric hatred of the Russians, a hatred which was no less intense than Herzen's equally eccentric hatred of the Germans.

Herzen was Borkheim's pet aversion whom he belaboured thoroughly in a series of articles which appeared at the beginning of 1868 in the *Demokratisches Wochenblatt* shortly after its appearance. Although at that time Bakunin had already broken with Herzen politically, he was attacked by Borkheim as one of Herzen's "cossacks" and pilloried with him as an "indestructible negation." Borkheim had read in one of Herzen's articles that years before Bakunin had made "the peculiar observation" that "active negation is a creative power," and in his moral indignation Borkheim asked rhetorically whether such an idea had ever occurred to anyone on the European side of the Russian frontier, adding that it would be laughed out of court by thousands of German schoolboys. The worthy Borkheim was unaware that Bakunin's often quoted declaration, "the lust for destruction is a creative lust" came from an article in the *Deutsche Jahrbücher* published at a time when Bakunin moved in Young Hegelian circles and co-operated with Marx and Ruge in founding the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*.

It is easy to realize that Marx regarded this and similar efforts with secret horror, and that he opposed Borkheim tooth and nail when the latter proposed to use Engels' articles against Bakunin in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* as the basis for his own gibberish because he felt that they "suited his own book so splendidly." Marx insisted that if the articles were used at all they must not be used insultingly, because Engels was an old personal friend of Bakunin, and when Engels supported Marx, Borkheim abandoned his plan. Johann Philipp Becker also wrote to Borkheim asking him not to attack Bakunin, but he received a petulant reply in which Borkheim declared, "with his usual delicacy," as Marx wrote to Engels, that he was prepared to continue his friendship for Becker and also his financial support (not very considerable, by the way) but that in the future politics must be avoided in their correspondence. With all his friendship for Borkheim Marx found that the former's "Russophobia" had taken on dangerous dimensions.

Marx's feelings of friendship for Bakunin were not affected by the fact that the latter took part in the congresses of the League for Peace and Freedom. The first congress of the League had already taken place in Geneva when Marx sent a copy of the first volume of his *Capital* to Bakunin with a personal dedication. Receiving no word of thanks, he made inquiries of a Russian emigrant in Geneva, to whom he had written on another matter, concerning his "old friend Bakunin," although he already harboured a faint doubt as to whether Bakunin was still his friend or not. The answer to this indirect inquiry was Bakunin's letter of the 22nd of December in which he promised to follow along the path which Marx had been pursuing for twenty years.

On the day Bakunin wrote this letter the General Council had already decided to reject the request of the Alliance of Socialist Democracy, forwarded through Becker, for permission to affiliate to the International. Marx was the prime mover in this rejection. He had known of the existence of the Alliance, which had been announced in *Der Vorbote*, but he had regarded it up

to then as a still-born local growth and not of any importance. He knew Becker as an otherwise reliable comrade, but inclined to indulge in organizational dabbings. Becker forwarded the program and the statutes of the Alliance and declared in an accompanying letter to the General Council that the Alliance was anxious to make good the lack of "idealism" in the International.

This unfortunate observation caused "great wrath" amongst the members of the General Council "and particularly amongst the French," as Marx wrote to Engels, and the rejection of the application of the Alliance was decided on immediately. Marx was instructed by the General Council to write the letter conveying its decision in the matter. The letter which he wrote to Engels "after midnight" on the 18th of December to obtain the latter's advice indicates that he himself was somewhat indignant about the affair. "Borkheim was right this time," he added. He was exercised not so much by the program of the Alliance as by its statutes. The program declared above all that the Alliance was atheist. It demanded the abolition of all religions, the replacement of belief by science, and of divine justice by human justice. It then demanded political, economic and social equality for all classes and all individuals of both sexes, and a beginning was to be made with the abolition of the right of inheritance. It further demanded that all children of both sexes should receive equal opportunities for development from birth on, that is to say, material care and education on all fields of science, industry and the arts. And finally the program condemned all forms of political activity which did not aim directly at securing the victory of labour over capital.

Marx's verdict on this program was not a flattering one. A little while afterwards he referred to it as "an olla podrida of worn-out platitudes, an empty rigmarole, a rosary of pretentious notions to make the flesh creep, a banal improvisation aiming at nothing more than a temporary effect." In theoretical matters the International was prepared to tolerate much, for its historical task was to develop a joint program for the international proletariat out of its practical activity. For this very reason its organization was of paramount importance as the preliminary condition for all successful practical activity, and the statutes of the Alliance made dangerous encroachments precisely on this field.

The Alliance declared itself a branch of the International and accepted all its general statutes, but it wanted to remain a separate organization. Its founders set themselves up in Geneva as a provisional central committee. National offices were to be opened in each country and to form groups everywhere, which should then be affiliated to the International. At the annual congresses of the International the representatives of the Alliance, as a branch of the International, proposed to hold their own public sessions in a special room.

Engels decided immediately. Acceptance was impossible. The result would be two General Councils and two congresses. At the first opportunity the practical General Council in London would find itself at loggerheads with the "idealist" General Council in Geneva. For the rest, he advised coolness in dealing with the matter. Any violent rejection would excite the very numerous Philistines amongst the workers (particularly in Switzerland) and do the International harm. One should reject the application of the Alliance calmly and firmly, and point out that it had chosen a special field for its activities and that the International would wait and see what success it had. In the meantime there was no reason why the members of the one association should not also be members of the other if they wanted to. His verdict on the program of the Alliance was very much like Marx's. He had never read anything so miserable in his life. Bakunin must have become a "perfect donkey," an observation which indicated no particular resentment against Bakunin, or at

least no more than when Marx referred to his old and loyal friend Becker as “an old confusionist.” In their private correspondence the two friends made generous use of such hearty invective.

In the meantime Marx had calmed down and he drew up the decision of the General Council refusing permission for the Alliance to affiliate to the International in a form to which no objection could be taken. An indirect sally at Becker was contained in the statement that actually a number of the founders of the Alliance had already settled the question by their co-operation as members of the International in the adoption of the decision of the Brussels congress not to amalgamate with the League for Peace and Freedom. The main reason given for the negative decision of the General Council was that to accept the affiliation of a second international body existing both inside and outside the International would be the best means of destroying the organization.

It is very unlikely that Becker fell into a great rage when he received the decision of the General Council. More credible is the statement of Bakunin that he was opposed from the beginning to the formation of the Alliance, but was out-voted by the members of his secret society. He had wished to maintain this secret society, whose members were to work within the International for the aims of the society, and he had wished for the immediate affiliation of the organization to the International in order to prevent all rivalries. In any case the central committee of the Alliance in Geneva answered the refusal of the General Council with an offer to turn the sections of the Alliance into sections of the International, if the General Council would recognize the theoretical program of the Alliance.

In the meantime Marx had received Bakunin’s friendly letter of the 22nd of December, but by this time his suspicions had been so aroused that he disregarded this “sentimental entree.” The new proposal of the Alliance also aroused his mistrust; nevertheless he did not permit himself to answer it in any but a thoroughly objective fashion. At his proposal the General Council decided on the 9th of March, 1869, that it was not within its province to examine the theoretical programs of the various workers’ organizations affiliated to the International. The working class in various countries was at various stages of development and in consequence their practical activity found theoretical expression in varying forms. Joint action, which was the aim of the international, the exchange of ideas between the various sections of the International and finally the direct discussions at the annual congresses, would gradually result in the development of a joint theoretical program for the whole of the working-class movement, but for the moment the task of the General Council was to determine only whether the general tendency of the various programs was in accordance with the general tendency of the International, that is to say, the struggle for the complete emancipation of the working class.

In this connection, the decision pointed out, the program of the Alliance contained a phrase which was open to dangerous misunderstanding: political, economic and social equality for all classes when taken literally meant nothing but harmony between capital and labour such as was preached by bourgeois socialists. The real secret of the proletarian movement and the great aim of the International was rather the destruction of all classes. However, as the context indicated, the phrase concerning “the equality of the classes” was probably due to a slip of the pen, and the General Council had no doubt that the Alliance would be prepared to abandon this dangerous phrase and then there would be no obstacle to the transformation of its sections into sections of the International. When this was finally done the General Council, according to the Statutes of the International, should be informed of the place and the membership figures of all new sections.

The Alliance then altered the phrase objected to by the General Council and announced on the 22nd of June that it had dissolved itself and called upon its sections to transform themselves into

sections of the International. The Geneva section of the Alliance, which was led by Bakunin, was accepted into the International by a unanimous vote of the General Council. Allegedly Bakunin's secret society had also dissolved itself, but it continued to exist in a more or less loose form and Bakunin himself continued to work for the program which the Alliance had set itself. From the autumn of 1867 to the autumn of 1869 he lived on the shores of the Lake of Geneva, sometimes in Geneva and at others in Vevey or Clarens, and won considerable influence amongst the Franco-Italian Swiss workers.

He was supported in his activity by the peculiar circumstances in which these workers lived. In order to understand the situation it is necessary to remember that the International was not an organization with a definite theoretical program, but one which tolerated all sorts of tendencies within its fold, as the General Council had pointed out in its letter to the Alliance. A glance through the columns of *Der Vorbote* will show that even such a zealous and meritorious pioneer of the International as Becker never bothered himself unduly about theoretical questions. And in fact there were two very different tendencies in the Geneva sections of the International. On the one hand there was the *fabrique*, as the highly-skilled and well-paid workers of the jewelry and watchmaking industries were called in the Geneva dialect. These workers were almost exclusively of local origin. And on the other hand there was the *gros metiers*, which consisted chiefly of building workers, almost exclusively foreign-born, mostly German, which were forced to fight one strike after another to maintain tolerably decent working conditions. The former possessed the franchise and the latter did not, but the numbers of the *fabrique* were not sufficient for them to hope for electoral successes on their own and in consequence they were very much inclined to make electoral compromises with the bourgeois radicals. The workers of the *gros metiers* were subjected to no such temptation and they were much more in favour of direct revolutionary action of the kind propagated by Bakunin.

Bakunin found an even more favourable recruiting field amongst the watchmakers of the Jura. These workers were not highly-skilled men engaged in the luxury trades, but chiefly domestic workers whose already miserable conditions of life were being threatened by American mass production. They were scattered in little villages all over the mountains and little suited to a mass movement with political aims. In addition they had been made shy of politics by a number of unfavourable experiences. The first man to agitate amongst them for the cause of the International was a doctor named Coullery, an honest man of humanitarian instincts, but politically hopelessly confused. He had led these workers into electoral alliances not only with the bourgeois radicals, but even with the monarchist liberals in Neuchâtel, in which the workers had invariably got the worst of the bargain. After Coullery had been completely discredited in their eyes, the workers of the Jura found a new leader in James Guillaume, a young teacher in the industrial centre of Locle, who had thoroughly assimilated their ideas, issued a little paper entitled *Le Progres* and preached an ideal anarchist society in which all men would be free and equal. When Bakunin went into the Jura for the first time he found the ground thoroughly prepared for his seed, but the poor devils there probably had a greater effect on him than he had on them, for from that time onward his condemnation of all forms of political activity became stronger than ever.

For the moment, however, peace reigned in the Franco-Italian Swiss sections of the International and in January, 1869, chiefly at Bakunin's instance, they formed a joint federal council and issued a fairly influential weekly newspaper entitled *l'Egalite*, to which Bakunin, Becker, Eccarius, Varlin and other prominent members of the International contributed. It was Bakunin who persuaded the federal council to put forward the question of the right of inheritance for

discussion at the next congress of the International in Basle. He was perfectly within his rights in doing so, for it was one of the chief tasks of the congress to discuss such questions and the General Council immediately agreed.

Marx, however, regarded the action as a challenge from Bakunin and as such he welcomed it.

5. The Basle Congress

The fourth congress of the International took place on the 5th and 6th of September in Basle and the International reviewed the fifth year of its existence.

It had proved the most lively year of all and had been shaken by “the guerrilla fights between capital and labour,” strikes which the ruling classes of Europe began to explain more and more not as the result of the misery of the proletariat or the despotism of capital, but as the result of the secret machinations of the International.

In consequence the brutal lust to smash the International by force of arms grew rapidly. Even in England bloody collisions took place between striking miners and the military. In the mining district of the Loire drunken soldiery staged a blood-bath near Ricamarie and twenty people were shot down, including two women and a child. Once again Belgium distinguished itself most horribly, “the model State of continental constitutionalism, the comfortable, carefully-fenced paradise of landowners, capitalists and priests,” as it was called in a powerful appeal drawn up by Marx and issued by the General Council to the workers of Europe and the United States on behalf of the victims shot down in Seraing and in the Borinage by the ruthless fury of the profit-hunters. “The earth completes its annual revolution no more certainly than the Belgian government its annual slaughter of the workers,” declared Marx.

The bloody seed ripened into the harvest of the International. In the autumn of 1868 the first elections took place in England on the basis of the reformed franchise, but the results confirmed the warnings which Marx had given the workers against the one-sided policy of the Reform League. Not a single workers’ representative was elected. The “big money-bags” were victorious and Gladstone again came to the helm, but he had no intention of bringing about a thorough settlement of the Irish question or redressing the just complaints of the trade unions, and as a result the New Unionism caught fresh wind in its sails.

At the annual congress of the trade unions which took place in Birmingham in 1869 an urgent appeal was issued to all working-class organizations in the United Kingdom to affiliate to the International, not only because the interests of the working class were everywhere the same, but because the principles of the International were calculated to secure permanent peace amongst the peoples of the world. In the summer of 1869 war had threatened between England and the United States, and an address was drawn up by Marx to the National Labour Union in the United States declaring: “It is now your turn to prevent a war whose inevitable result would be to throw back the advancing working-class movements on both sides of the Atlantic.” The address met with a lively echo in the United States.

In France also the cause of the working class was making good progress and the police persecutions had the usual result of recruiting new supporters for the International. The helpful intervention of the General Council in numerous strikes led to the formation of trade unions which could not be suppressed, no matter how obviously the spirit of the International lived in them. The workers took no part in the elections of 1869 by putting forward candidates of their

own, but they supported the candidates of the extreme bourgeois left, which came forward with a very radical election program. In this way the workers contributed at least indirectly to the heavy defeat which Bonaparte suffered, particularly in the big towns, although the fruits of their efforts fell for the moment into the lap of bourgeois democracy. The Second Empire began to creak ominously and from outside it received a heavy blow as the result of the revolution which took place in Spain in the autumn of 1868 and drove Queen Isabella from the country.

The course of development in Germany was somewhat different, for there Bonapartism was still advancing and not yet on the decline. The national question split the German working class and this split represented a great obstacle to the progress of the developing trade union movement. Thanks to his wrong policy in the trade union agitation Schweitzer had slithered into a situation which he could no longer control. The baseless attacks which were continuously directed against his personal honesty caused even some of his own followers to doubt him and he was ill-advised enough to endanger his reputation, which had not been seriously damaged, by a little coup d'état.

A minority in the Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein therefore turned its back on the organization and amalgamated with the Nuremberg associations into a new Social Democratic Party, whose members became known as the Eisenachers, owing to the fact that their inaugural congress took place in Eisenach. In the beginning both factions fought each other violently, but they took up more or less the same attitude towards the International. They were in agreement in principle, but disagreed in form as long as the German combination laws existed. Marx and Engels were very much annoyed when Liebknecht played off the General Council of the International against Schweitzer, a thing he had no right to do. Although they welcomed "the dissolution of the Lassallean Church," they could not do much with the other group until it had separated itself definitely from the German People's Party, or, at least, maintained only a loose cartel arrangement with the latter. For the rest, they were still of the opinion that as a debater Schweitzer was superior to all his opponents.

The progress of the Austro-Hungarian working-class movement, which had begun to develop only since the defeats of 1866, was more harmonious. Lassallean tendencies found no foothold and the masses of the workers began to rally to the standard of the International, as the General Council pointed out in its report to the Basle congress.

The congress thus met under favourable circumstances. Only 78 delegates were present, but the congress was much more "international" than the previous congresses had been. Nine countries were represented. The General Council was represented as usual by Eccarius and Jung, and apart from them by two of the most prominent English trade union leaders, Applegarth and Lucraft. France sent 26 delegates, Belgium 5, Germany 12, Austria 2, Switzerland 23, Italy 3, Spain 4 and the United States, one delegate. Liebknecht represented the Eisenach faction and Moses Hess the Berlin section. Bakunin had both a French and an Italian mandate and Guillaume had been delegated from Locle. The chair at the congress was again taken by Jung.

In the beginning the congress dealt with organizational questions. At the proposal of the General Council, it unanimously decided to recommend all its sections and affiliated bodies to abolish the office of President, an action which the General Council had taken on its own account several years previously, on the ground that it was not in accordance with the dignity of a working-class organization to maintain a monarchical and authoritarian principle within its ranks, for even where the presidency was only an honorary office it represented a violation of the democratic principle. On the other hand, the General Council proposed that its own executive powers should

be extended and that it should have the right to suspend from membership any section acting against the spirit of the International, pending the decision of the next congress. The proposal was adopted with the amendment that where federal councils existed, they should be consulted before the General Council took any such action. Both Bakunin and Liebknecht vigorously supported the proposal. Liebknecht's support was natural, but not that of Bakunin, who thereby violated his own anarchist principle, whatever his opportunist motives for so doing may have been. It is probable that he sought to drive out the devil with Beelzebub and counted on the assistance of the General Council against all parliamentary-political activity, which he considered purely opportunist. Perhaps he was supported in this idea by Liebknecht's well-known attack on the participation of Schweitzer and Bebel in the work of the North German Reichstag. However, Marx disapproved of Liebknecht's speech and Bakunin, who had reckoned without his host, was soon to learn that violations of principle always revenge themselves.

The most important theoretical problems on the agenda of the congress were the question of common ownership of the land and the question of the right of inheritance. The former question had actually already been settled at the Brussels congress, and this time it was disposed of summarily. With 54 votes the congress decided that society had the right to establish common ownership of the land, and with 53 votes that such an action was necessary in the interests of society as a whole. For the most part the minority abstained from voting. Eight delegates voted against the second decision, and four against the first. A variety of opinions resulted as to the practical measures for putting the decisions into effect and it was left to the next congress in Paris to discuss the question thoroughly.

In the question of the right of inheritance the General Council had drawn up a report which summed up the most important points in a few words in the masterly fashion typical of Marx. Like all other bourgeois legislation, the inheritance laws were not the cause, but the effect, the legal consequence of the economic organization of a society based on private property in the means of production. The right to inherit slaves had not been the cause of slavery. On the contrary, slavery had been the cause of the right to inherit slaves. If the means of production were turned into common property, then the right of inheritance would disappear as far as it was of social importance, because a man could leave to his heirs only that which he had possessed during his life. The great aim of the working class was, therefore, to abolish those institutions which gave a few people the economic power to appropriate the fruits of the labour of the many. To proclaim the abolition of the laws of inheritance as the starting point of a social revolution would, therefore, be just as absurd as to proclaim the abolition of the laws of contract between buyers and sellers so long as the present system of commodity exchange prevailed. It would prove false in theory and reactionary in practice. The right of inheritance could be altered only in a period of transition when on the one hand the existing economic basis of society had not yet been altered whilst on the other hand the working class already possessed sufficient power to carry through measures preparatory to a thorough transformation of society. As such transitional measures the General Council recommended the extension of death duties and the limitation of testamentary inheritance rights, which, as distinct from the right of family inheritance, exaggerated the principles of private property in a superstitious and arbitrary fashion.

However, the commission to which the question had been delegated for discussion proposed that the abolition of the right of inheritance should be proclaimed as one of the fundamental demands of the working class, although it could produce nothing in support of its proposal apart from a few ideological phrases about "privileges," political and economic justice" and "social

order.” In the comparatively brief discussion which followed, Eccarius, the Belgian delegate de Paepe and the French delegate Varlin spoke in favour of the report of the General Council, whilst Bakunin spoke on behalf of the commission’s proposal, whose spiritual father he was. He recommended the adoption of the proposal for reasons which were allegedly practical, but which were in reality quite illusory. It would be quite impossible to establish common property without first abolishing the right of inheritance. If one tried to take the land away from the peasants they would resist, but they would not feel themselves directly affected by the abolition of the right of inheritance, and thus private property would gradually die out. When a vote was taken, it was then that there were 32 in favour of the proposal of the commission, 23 against, 13 abstentions and 7 delegates absent. The report of the General Council received 19 votes, 37 against, 6 abstentions and 13 delegates absent. Thus neither the report of the General Council nor the proposal of the commission received a clear majority so that the discussion remained without any tangible result.

The Basle congress produced a louder echo than any of its predecessors both in the bourgeois and in the proletarian world. The most learned representatives of the bourgeoisie observed, half with horror and half with malicious satisfaction, that at last the communist character of the International had been revealed, whilst in the proletarian world the decisions in favour of the common ownership of the land were welcomed with joy. In Geneva the German-language section published a manifesto to the agricultural population which was translated into French, Italian, Spanish, Polish and Russian and widely distributed. In Barcelona and in Naples the first sections of agricultural workers arose. In London the Land and Labour League was formed at a big public meeting with the slogan, “The Land for the People!” Ten members of the General Council of the International were also members of its committee.

In Germany the worthy gentlemen of the German People’s Party were furious at the decisions of the Basle congress and at first Liebknecht permitted himself to be intimidated by their fury, even issuing a declaration to the effect that the Eisenach faction was not bound by the decisions of the congress. Fortunately, however, the indignant and highly respectable leaders of the German People’s Party were not content with this and demanded that the decisions of the congress should be expressly disavowed, whereupon Liebknecht finally broke off relations with them, a step to which Marx and Engels had urged him long before. However, his initial hesitation had brought grist to Schweitzer’s mill, for Schweitzer had “preached” the common ownership of the land in the Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein for years and had not just adopted it in order to ridicule his opponents, as was assumed by Marx, who found this “a piece of insolence.” Engels controlled his anger over the “blackguard” sufficiently to recognize that it was “very clever” of Schweitzer always to maintain a correct theoretical attitude, well knowing that his opponents were hopelessly lost immediately any question of theory arose.

For the moment, therefore, the Lassalleans remained not only the most firmly organized, but theoretically the most advanced of all the German working-class parties.

6. Confusion in Geneva

In so far as the discussion at the Basle congress on the right of inheritance had been a sort of intellectual duel between Bakunin and Marx, it had brought no final decision, but had been unfavourable rather than favourable for the latter. However, the contention that Marx was heavily

hit and now prepared for a powerful counterblast against Bakunin would not be in accordance with the facts.

Marx was quite satisfied with the result of the Basle congress. At the time he was with his daughter Jenny on a journey through Germany for the benefit of his health and on the 25th of September he wrote to his daughter Laura from Hanover: "I am glad that the Basle congress is now over and that its results were comparatively good. Such open displays of the party with all its sores always worry me. None of the actors was up to the level of his principles, but the idiocy of the upper class repairs the errors of the working class. Even the obscurest sheets in the smallest German towns through which we have passed were full of the deeds of this 'terrible congress.'" Bakunin was no more disappointed with the results of the Basle congress than was Marx. It has been said that Bakunin, with his proposal concerning the right of inheritance, wished to defeat Marx and obtain the removal of the General Council from London to Geneva as the fruit of his theoretical victory, and that when he did not succeed in this he attacked the General Council with increased violence in *l'Egalité*. These statements have been made so often that they have crystallized into a sort of legend, but nevertheless there is not a word of truth in them. After the Basle congress Bakunin did not write a line for *l'Egalité*; before the Basle congress he was its chief editor, but one will look in vain through the long series of articles he published in it for any trace of hostility towards the General Council or towards Marx. Four articles in particular, written on *The Principles of the International*, were completely in the spirit in which the International was founded. It is true that in these articles he expresses misgivings concerning the disastrous influences of what Marx termed "parliamentary cretinism" on the parliamentary representatives of the workers, but first of all such misgivings have been justified again and again since, and secondly his remarks were quite harmless compared with the violent attacks which Liebknecht was then making on the participation of the working class in bourgeois parliamentarism.

Further, Bakunin's ideas on the inheritance question may have been eccentric, but it was nevertheless his right to put them forward for discussion at the congress and in fact the congresses of the International have discussed much more eccentric ideas without those who put them forward being credited with any ulterior motives. The accusation that he had planned to secure the removal of the General Council from London to Geneva was answered briefly and strikingly by Bakunin immediately it was uttered publicly: "If such a proposal had been put forward, I should have been the first to oppose it and with all possible energy, because it would have seemed to me to be fatal for the future of the International. It is true that the Geneva sections have made tremendous progress in a very short space of time, but the atmosphere of Geneva is still too specifically local for it to be a good spot for the General Council. Apart from that, it is clear that so long as the present political organization of Europe exists, London will remain the only place suitable for the seat of the General Council and one would be a fool or an enemy of the International to propose to move it anywhere else."

There are people who consider that Bakunin was a liar from the very beginning and that his reply to the accusation against him was a subsequent excuse, but this theory collapses immediately in face of the fact that prior to the Basle congress Bakunin had arranged to move after the congress from Geneva to Locarno. His decision was taken for reasons over which he had no control. He was in urgent financial straits and his wife was expecting a child. He wished to settle down in Locarno and translate the first volume of Marx's *Capital* into Russian. A young admirer named Liubavin had persuaded a Russian publisher to pay 1,200 roubles for the translation and of this sum Bakunin received an advance of 300 roubles.

Although in the light of these facts all the intrigues which Bakunin is alleged to have set on foot before and after the Basle congress are seen to be non-existent, nevertheless the congress left a bitter taste in his mouth because, under the influence of Borkheim's incitement, Liebknecht had declared in the presence of third parties that he held proofs showing that Bakunin was an agent of the Russian government. Bakunin demanded that Liebknecht should support his accusations before a party court of honour and this he was unable to do, with the result that the court sternly reprimanded him. After the Cologne communist trial and his experiences in exile, Liebknecht was rather inclined to suspect spies everywhere, but he accepted the verdict of the court and offered Bakunin his hand as a sign of reconciliation, and the latter accepted it.

Bakunin was all the more embittered when a few weeks later, on the 2nd of October, Moses Hess revived the old slanders in the *Paris Reveil*. Hess, who was present at the Basle congress as a German delegate, was giving the secret history of the congress, and in this connection he dealt with Bakunin's "intrigues" with a view to undermining the fundamental basis of the International and securing the removal of the General Council from London to Geneva. He declared that Bakunin's plans had come to nothing at the congress and concluded with the baseless insinuation that he, Hess, did not want to impugn Bakunin's revolutionary honesty, but that the Russian was closely related to Schweitzer, who had been accused by the German delegates at the Basle congress of being an agent of the German government. The malicious intent of this denunciation was made all the clearer by the fact that it was quite impossible to establish any "close relation" between the agitation of Schweitzer and the agitation of Bakunin, and that personally the two men had never had anything whatever to do with each other.

It would certainly have been wiser for Bakunin to have ignored this article which was ignoble enough in all conscience, but it is easy to understand that he was provoked to anger by the repeated attacks on his political honesty, particularly when the attacks were underhanded and malicious. He therefore wrote a reply, but in his initial anger the reply grew so long that he realized himself that the *Reveil* could not possibly publish it. He attacked the "German Jews" with particular violence, but expressly excepted "giants" like Lassalle and Marx from the race of pygmies à la Borkheim and Hess. He then decided to use this long reply as an introduction to a book on his revolutionary beliefs and sent it to Herzen in Paris with the request that the latter should try to find a publisher, adding a shorter reply for the *Reveil*. However, Herzen feared that even this would not be published and he himself wrote a defence of Bakunin against Hess, and this defence was published by the *Reveil* together with an editorial comment which completely pacified Bakunin.

Herzen was not at all satisfied with the longer reply. He disapproved of the attacks on the "German Jews," and was surprised that Bakunin attacked little known people like Borkheim and Hess instead of challenging Marx. Bakunin answered on the 28th of October, declaring that although he considered Marx responsible for the attacks made on him he had refrained from attacking Marx for two reasons and had even called him a "giant." The first reason was one of justice. "Apart from all the nasty tricks he has played us, we, or at least I, cannot ignore his tremendous services to the cause of socialism, which he has served for almost twenty-five years with insight, energy and disinterestedness, and in which he has undoubtedly excelled us all. He was one of the founders, the chief founder in fact, of the International and in my eyes that is a tremendous service and one which I shall always recognize no matter what he may have done against us."

And then he was guided by political and tactical considerations towards Marx, "who cannot stand me and loves no one but himself and perhaps those who are nearest to him. Marx's influence

in the International is undoubtedly very useful. He has exercised a wise influence on his party down to the present day and he is the strongest support of socialism and the firmest bulwark against the invasion of bourgeois ideas and intentions. I should never forgive myself if I had ever tried to destroy or even weaken his beneficial influence merely in order to revenge myself on him. However, a situation may arise, and shortly at that, in which I shall take up the struggle against him, though certainly not in order to attack him personally, but on a question of principle, on account of the State communism which he, and the English and Germans he leads, support so enthusiastically. That would be a life and death struggle, but everything comes in its own good time and the hour of conflict has not yet arrived.”

And finally Bakunin mentions a tactical reason which prevented him from attacking Marx. If he attacked Marx openly, then three-quarters of the International would be against him, but on the other hand, if he attacked the ragtag and bobtail that crowded around Marx, the majority of the International would be on his side and Marx himself would find a certain amount of malicious pleasure in it. Schadenfreude is the German word which Bakunin uses in his letter to Herzen, otherwise written in French.

Immediately after writing this letter Bakunin moved to Locarno. He was so occupied with his personal affairs that during the last few weeks he spent in Geneva after the Basle congress he took no part at all in the working-class movement and did not write a line for *l’Egalité*. His successor on the editorial board was Robin, a Belgian teacher who had moved to Geneva about a year previously, and together with him Perron, the enameller who had edited the paper before Bakunin. Both were supporters of Bakunin, but they did not act on his instructions. Bakunin’s aim was to enlighten the workers of the *gros métiers*, in whom the revolutionary proletarian spirit was much more alive than in the workers of the *fabrique*, and to encourage them to undertake independent action. In this he found himself in opposition to their own committees – and what he has to say about the objective dangers of such a “departmental policy,” as we should call it nowadays, is well worth reading even now – not to speak of the *fabrique*, which had supported the workers of the *gros métiers* in their strikes and drew from this undeniable service the false conclusion that the workers of the *gros métiers* should follow faithfully every step of their colleagues of the *fabrique*. Bakunin had fought against these tendencies, particularly in view of the incurable leanings of the *fabrique* towards alliances with bourgeois radicalism. However, Robin and Perron thought that they could whitewash and patch up the differences between the *gros métiers* and the *fabrique*, differences which had not been created by Bakunin, but which had their basis in a social antagonism. As a result they slithered into a see-saw system which satisfied neither the *gros métiers* nor the *fabrique* and opened the door to all sorts of intrigues.

A master of such intrigues was a Russian fugitive named Nikolas Utin, who lived in Geneva at the time. He had taken part in the Russian student disturbances at the beginning of the sixties, and when the country grew too hot for him he fled abroad where he lived comfortably on a considerable income – from twelve to fifteen thousand francs have been mentioned – which he derived from the trade of his father in spirits. This fact won him a position which the intellectual capacities of the vain and garrulous fellow could never have obtained for him. His successes were exclusively on the field of tittle-tattle where, as Engels once said, “the man with something serious to do can never compete with those who have all day to gossip in.” In the beginning Utin had made up to Bakunin, only to be thoroughly snubbed by him, and when Bakunin left Geneva, Utin seized the opportunity to revenge himself for his wounded vanity by pursuing him with underhand slander. His efforts to this edifying end were not without result and afterwards he

cast himself humbly at the feet of the Tsar and begged for mercy. The Tsar proved he was not adamant and during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877, Utin became a contractor to the Tsarist army, in which capacity he no doubt worshipped Mammon even more successfully than he had done through the paternal spirits business.

People like Robin and Perron were easy game for Utin, for although their personal honesty was above reproach they were almost incredibly clumsy, and to make matters worse they began a squabble with the General Council on questions which were certainly not of any urgent interest to the France-Swiss workers. *L'Egalité* complained bitterly that the General Council paid far too much attention to the Irish question, that it failed to set up a Federal Council for the English sections, that it did not arbitrate in the conflict between Liebknecht and Schweitzer, etc. Bakunin had nothing to do with all this, and the wrong impression that he approved of these attacks on the General Council or even instigated them was caused exclusively by the fact that Robin and Perron were his supporters and that Guillaume's paper took up the same attitude.

The General Council replied to Robin's attacks in a private circular dated the 1st of January, 1870, and addressed, apart from Geneva, only to the French-speaking Federal Councils. Although this circular was sharp in its tone it remained well within the limits of objective argument. The reasons which the General Council gave for not forming a Federal Council in England are interesting still. It declared that although the revolutionary initiative would probably come from France, nevertheless only England could serve as the lever for any serious economic revolution. It was the only country where there were no longer any peasants and where the ownership of the land was concentrated in the hands of a few landowners. It was the only country where the capitalist mode of production had established itself in almost the whole of production and where the great mass of the population consisted of wage-workers. It was the only country where the class struggle and the organization of the workers had reached a certain degree of universality and maturity. And finally, thanks to the dominant position of England on the world market, any revolution in its economic conditions would immediately react on the whole world.

Although, therefore, all the necessary material conditions for a social revolution existed in England, nevertheless the English workers did not possess either a capacity for generalization or revolutionary ardour. The task of the General Council was to give the English workers this spirit and this ardour, and the fact that it was performing its task successfully could be seen from the complaints of the big bourgeois newspapers in London that the General Council was poisoning the English spirit of the workers and driving them towards revolutionary socialism. An English Federal Council would come between the General Council of the International and the General Council of the trade unions. It would enjoy no prestige, and the General Council of the International would lose its influence on the great lever of the proletarian revolution. It therefore refused to commit the folly of placing this lever in English hands and contenting itself with bombastic mouthings in the place of serious and unseen work.

Before this circular arrived at its destination the trouble came to a head in Geneva itself. Seven members of the editorial board of *L'Egalité* were supporters of Bakunin and only two were his opponents. Arising out of a subordinate and politically unimportant incident, the majority raised the question of confidence, and it was then seen that with their vacillating policy Robin and Perron had sat down between two stools. The minority was supported by the Federal Council and the seven members of the majority had to resign, including Becker who had been very friendly with Bakunin whilst the latter lived in Geneva, but who had found many things to object to in the policy of Robin and Perron. The control of *L'Egalité* then went over into the hands of Utin.

7. “The Confidential Communication”

In the meantime Borkheim continued his incitement against Bakunin. On the 18th of February he complained to Marx that *Die Zukunft*, the organ of Johann Jacoby, had refused to publish what Marx described in a letter to Engels as, “a monster epistle on Russian affairs, an indescribable hodge-podge of minute details all tumbling one over the other.” At the same time Borkheim cast suspicion on Bakunin “in connection with certain financial transactions,” on the authority of Katkov, who in his youth had been a follower of Bakunin but later went over to the reaction. Marx paid little attention to this accusation and Engels remarked philosophically: “Borrowing money is too typical a Russian means of existence for one Russian to be able to reproach another about it.”

After informing Engels about Borkheim’s continued incitement against Bakunin, Marx declared that the General Council had been called upon to decide whether a certain Richard (who later really turned out to be a bad lot) had been expelled from the International in Lyons with justification, and added that as far as he could see the man could be accused of nothing more than a slavish support of Bakunin and an accompanying self-conceit. “It appears that our last circular made a sensation and that in France and Switzerland a regular hunt against the Bakuninists has begun. However, there must be moderation in all things and I shall see to it that no injustice is done.”

A confidential communication which Marx directed a few weeks later, on the 28th of March, through the mediation of Kugelmann to the Brunswick committee of the Eisenachers was in strong contrast with the good intentions with which he had concluded his letter to Engels. The basis of this confidential communication was the circular of the General Council, intended only for Geneva and for the French-speaking Federal Councils. This had long since served its purpose and had in fact let loose the “regular hunt” against the Bakuninists of which Marx had expressed his disapproval. It is difficult to see why Marx communicated the contents of this circular to Germany in face of the unpleasant result it had already had elsewhere, particularly as Bakunin had no supporters in Germany at all.

It is still more difficult to understand why he provided the circular with an introduction and a close which were even more calculated to let loose a “regular hunt,” particularly against Bakunin. The introduction began with bitter reproaches against Bakunin who had first of all attempted to smuggle himself into the League for Peace and Freedom, only to be closely observed in its executive committee as a “suspected Russian.” After having failed to secure the adoption of his programmatic absurdities in the League, he had then turned his attention to the International in order to make it into his private instrument. To this end he had founded the Alliance of Socialist Democracy. After the General Council had refused to recognize the Alliance the latter had nominally been dissolved, but in fact it had continued to exist under Bakunin’s leadership, who had then sought to attain his ends with other means. He had put forward the question of the right of inheritance at the Basle congress in the hope of defeating the General Council on the theoretical field and causing its removal from London to Geneva. He had organized “a downright conspiracy” in order to secure a majority of the Basle congress. However, he had not been successful and the General Council had remained in London. “Bakunin’s anger at the failure of his plan – perhaps he had attached all sorts of private speculations to its success – “ had then expressed itself in the attacks of *l’Egalité* on the General Council, attacks which had been answered in the circular of the 1st of January.

Marx then inserted the full text of the circular in his confidential communication and continued: Even before the arrival of the circular the crisis had come to a head in Geneva. The Franco-Italian Swiss Federal Council had disapproved of the attacks made by l'Egalité on the General Council and decided to keep a close control over the paper for the future. Bakunin had then retired the canton of Ticino." Soon afterwards Herzen died. Bakunin, who had disavowed his old friend and patron from the moment he wished to put himself forward as the leader of the European working-class movement, then immediately began to sound a fanfare in Herzen's praise. Why? Despite his own wealth, Herzen had been in receipt of an annual sum of 25,000 francs for propaganda from the pseudo-socialist Pan-Slavist party in Russia, with which he was friendly. Thanks to his lavish praise, Bakunin succeeded in obtaining this money himself and then accepted 'Herzen's heritage' gladly much as he hated inheritance. In the meantime a colony of young Russian fugitives had established itself in Geneva, students who were really honest in their endeavours and who had made the struggle against Pan-Slavism the chief point in their program. They had asked to be admitted as a section of the International, proposing that Marx should be their provisional representative on the General Council, and both these requests had been granted. They had also declared that they were about to tear the mask from Bakunin's face publicly. In this way, the confidential communication concluded, the game of this highly dangerous intriguer would be up, at least as far as the International was concerned.

It is hardly necessary to enumerate the many errors the communication contains. Generally speaking, the more incriminating the accusations it makes against Bakunin appear to be, the more baseless they are in reality. This is true in particular of the accusation of legacy-hunting. No pseudo-socialist Pan-Slavist party in Russia ever paid Herzen 25,000 francs annually for propaganda. The unsubstantial basis of this fairy tale was that in the revolutionary years a young Russian named Batmetiev had given 25,000 francs to start a revolutionary fund and that Herzen had administered this fund. There is no reason whatever to believe that Bakunin ever showed any inclination to pocket this fund on his own behalf and certainly the warm obituary he wrote for Rochefort's Marseillaise on a political opponent who had been a friend of his youth cannot be quoted in support of such a statement. At the utmost the obituary might offer an opportunity for an accusation of sentimentality, just as all the errors and weaknesses of Bakunin, no matter how numerous they may have been, were due to characteristics which were, generally speaking, the opposite of those going into the make-up of a "highly dangerous intriguer.

The concluding passages of the confidential communication show how Marx came to fall into these errors concerning Bakunin. His information was obtained from the Russian fugitives' committee in Geneva, in other words, from Utin, or through him from Becker. At least, a letter from Marx to Engels seems to indicate that he obtained the most serious of the accusations, that of legacy-hunting, from Becker. However, this does not rhyme with a contemporary letter from the latter to Jung, which is still extant, in which Becker complains about the confusion prevailing in Geneva, about the antagonism between the fabrique and the gros metiers, about weak-nerved illusionists like Robin and obstinate cranks like Bakunin," but ends up by praising Bakunin and declaring that he was much better and more useful than he had been. The letters of Becker and the Russian fugitives' committee in Geneva to Marx are no longer extant, and in both his official and private answers to this new section of the International, Marx apparently thought it better to say nothing about Bakunin at all. He advised the Russian section to work chiefly for Poland, that is to say, to free Europe from its own proximity, and he did not fail to see the humour of

being the representative of young Russia, declaring that a man could never know in what strange company he might fall.

Although he treated the matter with a certain amount of humour, it was obviously a great satisfaction to him to observe that the International was beginning to find a foothold amongst the Russian revolutionaries, and otherwise it would be impossible to understand why he was prepared to believe accusations against Bakunin made by Utin, who was completely unknown to him, when he had refused to credit them from his old friend Borkheim. By a peculiar coincidence Bakunin fell victim just at that time to an error of judgment with regard to a Russian fugitive, whom he regarded as the first swallow of the coming Russian revolutionary summer, and even let himself be drawn into an adventure which was to do his reputation more harm than any other incident in his whole adventurous life.

A few days after the confidential communication had been written, on the 4th of April, the second annual congress of the Franco-Italian Swiss Federation took place in La Chaux-de-Fonds, and an open breach occurred. The Geneva section of the Alliance, which had already been accepted into the International by the General Council, demanded that it should also be accepted into the Federation and that its two delegates should be given representation at the congress. Utin opposed this and made violent attacks on Bakunin, denouncing the Geneva section as his instrument of intrigue, but he was vigorously opposed by Guillaume, a narrow-minded fanatic who in later years treated Marx as badly as Utin treated Bakunin, but a man whose education and capacity put him in a different class altogether from that of his pitiful opponent. Guillaume was victorious with a majority of 21 against 18 votes. However, the minority refused to recognize the decision of the majority and split the congress. Two congresses then met simultaneously. The majority congress decided to move the seat of the Federal Council from Geneva to La Chaux-de-Fonds and to make Solidarité, which Guillaume issued in Neuchatel, the organ of the Federal Council.

The minority justified its attitude by declaring that the majority was a purely accidental one, because only 15 sections had been represented at La Chaux-de-Fonds whilst Geneva alone had thirty sections which all or almost all opposed the acceptance of the Alliance into the Franco-Italian Swiss action. The majority, on the other hand, insisted that a section which had been admitted by the General Council could not be rejected by a Federal Council. Becker declared in *Der Vorbote* that the whole affair was much objectionable ado about nothing and had been possible only by a lack of fraternal feelings on both sides. The section of the Alliance was chiefly interested in the propaganda of theoretical principles and could therefore not attach much importance to being accepted into a national organization, all the more so as it was regarded in Geneva as the plotting tool of Bakunin, who had long been unpopular there. On the other hand, if the Alliance really wanted to be accepted, it was narrow-minded and childish to refuse or to make its acceptance the reason for a split.

However, the situation was not quite so simple as Becker described it. The decisions which the two separate congresses adopted were similar in many respects, but they differed just in the cardinal question – the antagonism out of which the whole confusion in Geneva had developed. The majority congress completely adopted the standpoint of the *gros métiers*. It condemned all forms of politics which aimed merely at social changes through national reforms, declaring that every politically organized State was nothing but a means of capitalist exploitation on the basis of bourgeois law, and therefore any participation of the proletariat in bourgeois politics consolidated the existing system and paralyzed revolutionary proletarian action. The minority congress,

on the other hand, adopted the standpoint of the fabrique. It condemned political abstinence as damaging to the cause of the working class, and recommended participation in the elections, not because it would be possible to secure the emancipation of the workers in this way, but because the parliamentary representation of the workers was a means of agitation and propaganda which it would not be tactical to ignore.

The newly-formed Federal Council in La Chaux-de-Fonds demanded recognition from the General Council as the leader of the Federation. However, the General Council refused to give this recognition and on the 28th of June it declared that the Federal Council in Geneva, which was supported by the majority of the Geneva sections, should continue to exercise its old functions, whilst the new Federal Council should adopt a local name. Although this decision was fair enough and had been provoked by the new Federal Council, the latter refused to submit to it and protested vigorously against the dictatorial tendencies, against the “authoritarianism” of the General Council, thus giving the opposition within the International the second plank in its platform – the first being political abstinence. The General Council then severed all relations with La Chaux-de-Fonds.

Chapter Fourteen: The Decline of the International

[...]

4. The International and the Paris Commune

By taking over the heritage of the Commune without previously sorting over the remains, the International faced a world of enemies.

Least important were the slanderous attacks with which it was overwhelmed by the bourgeois press of all countries. On the contrary, as a result of these attacks it won, in a certain sense and to a certain degree, a propaganda weapon because the General Council was able to reply to such attacks openly and thus at least secured a hearing in the English press.

A much greater problem for the International was that presented by the necessity of assisting the numerous fugitive communards who fled to Belgium and to Switzerland, but chiefly to London. The state of its finances grew more and more unfavourable and the collection of the necessary funds to assist the fugitives met with great difficulties and necessitated great efforts. For many months the General Council was compelled to devote its chief energies and the greater part of its time to this problem, to the detriment of its normal tasks, although the latter became more and more urgent as almost all governments now began to mobilize their forces against the International.

However, even this war of the governments against the International was not its chief trouble. The campaign against the International was carried on with more or less energy in the various continental countries, but the attempts to unite all governments in a joint campaign of repression against the class-conscious proletariat failed for the moment. The first attempt of this nature was made by the French government on the 6th of June, 1871, in a circular issued by Jules Favre. But the document was so stupid and mendacious that it made little impression on the other governments, even on Bismarck, who was invariably willing to listen to any reactionary suggestion, particularly when it was directed against the working class, and who had been startled out of his megalomania by the support accorded to the Commune by the German Social Democracy, including both the Lassallean and the Eisenach fractions.

A little later the Spanish government made a second attempt to unite the governments of Europe against the International, this time also by means of a circular, issued to all governments by its Minister for Foreign Affairs. It was not sufficient, this circular declared, that individual governments should take the most severe measures against the International and its sections in their own territories. All governments should unite to exterminate the evil. This challenge might have met with greater success but for the fact that the English government immediately scotched it. Lord Granville replied that "in this country" the International had limited its operations chiefly to giving advice in strikes, and had only very limited funds with which to support such actions,

whilst the revolutionary plans which formed a part of its program represented rather the opinions of its foreign members than those of the British workers, whose attention was directed chiefly to wage questions. However, foreigners in England enjoyed the protection of the laws of the country in the same way as British subjects. If they violated these laws by conducting warlike operations against any country with which Great Britain maintained friendly relations they would be punished, but for the present there was no reason for taking any special measures against foreigners on British soil. This reasonable rejection of an unreasonable demand caused Bismarck's semi-official mouthpiece to snarl that any measures taken against the International would for the most part remain ineffective so long as British territory represented as asylum from which all the other States of Europe could be disturbed with impunity and under the protection of the British law.

Thus, although its enemies did not succeed in organizing a joint crusade on the part of the various governments against the International, the International itself did not succeed in organizing a solid phalanx of resistance to the persecutions suffered by its sections in the various continental countries. This was its chief cause of anxiety and it was made still more serious by the fact that the International felt the ground trembling under its feet in just those countries whose working classes it had regarded as its firmest bulwarks: England, France and Germany, where large-scale industrial development was farthest progressed and whose workers possessed a more or less limited franchise. The importance of these countries for the International was reflected in the fact that there were twenty Englishmen, fifteen Frenchmen and seven Germans on its General Council as against only two representatives each from Switzerland and Hungary and one representative each from Poland, Belgium, Ireland, Denmark and Italy.

From the very beginning Lassalle had organized his agitation amongst the German workers as a national affair and this had brought him bitter reproaches from Marx, but it was soon seen that this fact helped the German workers' movement over a crisis which severely shook the socialist movement in all other continental countries. For the moment, the war against France had resulted in the temporary standstill of the German working-class movement. The two factions had enough to occupy them in their own affairs to prevent them bothering much about the International. Although both factions had declared themselves against the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine and in favour of the Paris Commune, the Eisenach faction, which alone was recognized by the General Council as a section of the International, had come so much into the foreground that it had been harassed by the authorities with indictments for high treason and similar disagreeable matters far more than the Lassallean faction. It was Bebel who, according to Bismarck's own evidence, first awakened the suspicion of the latter by his fiery speech in the Reichstag in which he declared the German Social Democracy in solidarity with the Paris communards, and who caused Bismarck to deliver increasingly violent blows against the German working-class movement. However, much more decisive for the attitude of the Eisenach faction towards the International was the fact that since it had constituted itself as an independent party on a national basis it had become more and more estranged from the International.

In France Thiers and Favre had caused the monarchist-reactionary National Assembly to pass a draconic law aimed specially against the International; this law completely paralyzed the French working class, which had already been weakened to the point of utter exhaustion by the fearful blood-letting of the Versailles massacres. In their fierce desire for revenge these upholders of law and order even went so far as to demand from Switzerland, and even from England, the extradition of the fugitive communards as common criminals, and as far as Switzerland was concerned

they came within an ace of being successful. Under these circumstances the connections of the General Council in France were completely broken off. In order to secure the representation of the French workers on its General Council, the International co-opted a number of fugitive communards (partly men who had already been members of the International and partly men who had distinguished themselves by their revolutionary energy in the cause of the Commune), its aim being to honour the Commune. This was a good idea as far as it went, but it weakened the General Council rather than strengthened it, for the fugitive communards suffered the inevitable fate of all emigrants and exhausted their energies in internal struggles. Marx now had to go through the same troubles and difficulties with the French emigrants as he had had with the German emigrants twenty years previously. He was certainly the last man to demand any recognition for doing what he, in any case, considered it his duty to do, but in November, 1871, the constant bickerings of the French fugitives caused him to sigh regretfully: "And that's my reward for having wasted almost five months of my time on their behalf and for having vindicated their honour in the Address!"

And finally, the International lost the support which it had previously enjoyed from the English workers. Externally the breach first appeared when two reputable leaders of the trade union movement, Lucraft and Odger, who had been members of the General Council since its inception, Odger even as President so long as that office had existed, resigned from the council on account of the Address on The Civil War in France. This action gave rise to the legend that the trade unions parted company with the International owing to their moral abhorrence of the latter's defence of the Commune. The grain of truth which this legend contains by no means represents the real issue. The breach was due to much more important and deep-lying reasons.

From the beginning, the alliance between the International and the trade unions was a *mariage de convenance*. Both parties needed each other, but neither ever intended to bind itself up with the other for better or for worse and till death did them part. With masterly dexterity Marx had drawn up a joint program in the Inaugural Address and the Statutes of the International, but although the trade unions were thus able to accept the program, in practice they never used any more of it than suited their purpose. In his answering despatch to the Spanish government Lord Granville correctly describes the relation between the English trade unions and the International. The aim of the trade unions was to improve working conditions on the basis of capitalist society, and in order to further this aim they did not scorn the political struggle, but in the choice of their allies and their weapons they were guided by no fundamental considerations, so far as such considerations did not apply immediately to their actual aim.

Marx was soon compelled to recognize that this egoistic peculiarity of the trade unions, which was deeply rooted in the history and the character of the English proletariat, could not be broken so easily. The trade unions needed the International in order to carry the Reform Bill, but once this was achieved they began to flirt with the Liberals, for without the assistance of the latter they could not hope to win seats in Parliament. Even in 1868 Marx had complained of these "intriguers" and had mentioned Odger, who put up for Parliament on several occasions, as one of them. On another occasion Marx justified the presence of a number of the supporters of the Irish sectarian Bronterre O'Brien in the General Council with the following significant words: "Despite their follies these O'Brienites represent a (very often necessary) counter-weight to the trade unionists in the General Council. They are more revolutionary, more definite in their attitude to the land question, less national, not open to corruption in any shape or form, and but for that they would have been turned out long ago." He also opposed the repeated proposal that a special Federal

Council should be formed for England, chiefly on the ground, given for instance in the circular of the General Council issued on the 1st of January, 1870, that the English lacked revolutionary ardour and the capacity to generalize, so that any such Federal Council would become a tool in the hands of radical members of Parliament.

After the secession of the English working-class leaders Marx accused them bluntly of having sold themselves to the Liberal Ministry. This may have been true of some of them, but it was not true of all, even if one assumes "corruption" to include other forms than that of cash payment. As a trade union leader, Applegarth enjoyed at least as big a reputation as Odger and Lucraft, and was in fact considered by both Houses of Parliament as the official representative of trade unionism. Immediately after the Basle congress of the International he had been questioned by his parliamentary patrons as to his attitude towards the decision of the congress in the question of the common ownership of the land, etc., but he had refused to let himself be intimidated by their scarcely veiled threat. In 1870 he was appointed a member of the Royal Commission upon the Contagious Diseases Acts, thus becoming the first worker entitled to be styled by his Sovereign "Our Trusty and Well-beloved," nevertheless he signed the Address of the General Council on The Civil War in France and remained a member of the Council to the end.

The attitude of Applegarth, whose personal character is above reproach and who later refused an appointment on the Board of Trade, indicates clearly the real reasons for the secession of the trade union leaders. The immediate aim of the trade unions was to secure legal protection for themselves and their funds. This aim appeared to have been achieved when in the spring of 1871 the government brought in a bill giving every trade union the right to register itself as an approved society, thereby receiving legal protection for its funds providing that its statutes did not conflict with the law. However, what the government gave with one hand it immediately took away with the other, for the bill contained a lengthy clause which practically abolished the right of combination by confirming all the old elastic terms aimed at preventing strikes by prohibiting "violence," "threats," "intimidation," "molesting," "obstruction," etc. It was in fact nothing but a law aimed specially against the trade unions, and every action taken by them, or by anyone else, with a view to furthering their cause was declared punishable, whilst the same actions when committed by other bodies remained legal. With politeness and restraint the historians of British trade unionism declare: "It seemed of little use to declare the existence of trade societies to be legal if the criminal law was so stretched as to include the ordinary peaceful methods by which these societies attained their ends." For the first time, therefore, the trade unions were legally recognized and afforded protection, but at the same time all the provisions of the laws against trade union action were expressly confirmed and even intensified.

Naturally, the trade unions and their leaders rejected this Greek gift, but their protests succeeded only in persuading the government to divide its bill into two separate parts: a Bill legalizing the existence of the trade unions and a Criminal Law Amendment Bill embracing all the clauses against trade union activity. That was of course no real success, but merely a trap into which the trade-union leaders were invited to fall, and into which, in fact, they did fall because their anxiety for their funds was greater than their loyalty to trade-union principles. All of them, and Applegarth was even in the van, registered their organizations under the new law, and in September, 1871, the Conference of Amalgamated Trades, the representative body of the "New Unionism," which had once been the link between the International and the unions, formally dissolved itself, "having discharged the duties for which it was organized." Owing to the fact that in their gradual approach towards middleclass respectability the leaders of the trade unions had

come to regard strikes as one of the more primitive methods of trade union activity, it was not difficult for them to salve their consciences. As early as 1867 one of them had declared, in giving evidence before a Royal Commission, that strikes were a sheer waste of money and energies both for the workers and their employers. Therefore, in 1871, when a powerful movement in favour of the nine hour day swept over the country, the trade-union leaders did their utmost to hold back the workers, who had not participated in the “statesmanlike” development of their leaders and who were fiercely indignant at the new Criminal Law Amendment Bill against trade union activities. This movement began on the 1st of April with a strike of the engineering workers in Sunderland, spread rapidly throughout the engineering centres and culminated in the Newcastle strike which lasted five months and ended in a complete victory for the workers. The great engineering union, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, was definitely opposed to this mass movement on the part of the workers, and only after the strike had been proceeding for fourteen weeks did those strikers who were members of the union receive strike support, which was fixed at five shillings a week. With this and the usual unemployment support they had to carry on their struggle. The movement, which quickly spread to a number of other trades and industries, was led exclusively by the “Nine Hours League,” which had been formed for this purpose and had a very capable leader in John Burnett.

On the other hand, the Nine Hours League received vigorous support from the General Council of the International, which sent its members Cohn and Eccarius to Belgium and Denmark to prevent the agents of the employers recruiting strike-breakers there, a task which they both performed with a considerable degree of success. Whilst negotiating with Burnett, Marx was unable to suppress the bitter remark that it was a peculiar misfortune that the organized bodies of workers remained aloof from the International until they were in trouble, whereas if they came in good time it would be easier to take effective precautionary measures. For the moment, however, the course of development made it appear as though the International were about to be richly compensated by the masses for what it had lost in their leaders. New sections were formed and the existing sections greatly increased their strength, but at the same time the demand that a special Federal Council should be formed for England was raised with increasing urgency.

Marx then finally made the concession that he had refused for so long. With the fall of the Paris Commune the possibility of a new revolution had receded into the background and apparently, therefore, he no longer attached such importance to the General Council keeping its hand directly on the strongest lever of the revolution. However, his old misgivings soon proved to be justified and with the establishment of the Federal Council the traces of the International began to disappear more rapidly in England than in any other country.

5. The Bakuninist Opposition

After the fall of the Paris Commune the International had difficulties enough to face in Germany, France and England, but they were nothing compared to the troubles in those countries in which its foothold was weak. The small centre of trouble which had formed in Switzerland even before the Franco-Prussian War now spread to Italy, Spain, Belgium and other countries, and it began to look as though Bakunin’s ideas would be victorious over those of the General Council.

Not that this development was due to Bakunin’s intrigues as the General Council assumed. It is true that in the beginning of 1871 he interrupted his work on the translation of the first volume

of Capital in order to devote his attention completely to new political activities, but these latter had nothing to do with the International, and in the end they seriously damaged his own political reputation. It was the notorious Netchayeff affair and it cannot be disposed of as easily as the enthusiastic admirers of Bakunin would like when they ascribe his errors to "too great trust as a result of too great goodness."

At the time Netchayeff was a young man in the twenties. He had been born a serf, but thanks to the patronage of liberal-minded persons he had been able to attend a seminary to be trained as a teacher. He fell in with the Russian students' movement of the day and won a certain position in it, not as the result of his education, which was scanty, or his brain, which was mediocre, but on account of his fierce energy and his boundless hatred of Tsarist oppression. His chief characteristic was his complete freedom from all moral considerations when he thought to further his cause. Personally he asked for nothing, and when it was necessary he did without everything, but when he thought he was acting in a revolutionary fashion he was prepared to stop at nothing, no matter how reprehensible it might be.

He first appeared in Geneva in the spring of 1869, demanding double admiration as a prisoner of State escaped from the fortress of St. Peter-Paul and as a delegate from an all-powerful committee which was supposed to be secretly preparing the revolution throughout Russia. Both statements were inventions; Netchayeff had never been in St. Peter-Paul and no such committee existed. After the arrest of a number of his immediate companions he had left Russia in order, as he declared, to influence the older emigrants to use their names and their writings to stir up the enthusiasm of Russian youth. As far as Bakunin was concerned he succeeded in an almost incredible fashion. Bakunin was deeply impressed by "the young savage," "the young tiger" (as he used to call Netchayeff), as the representation of a new generation whose revolutionary energy would overthrow Tsarist Russia. Bakunin believed so firmly in the "committee" that he placed himself unconditionally at its orders, which were given to him through Netchayeff, and immediately declared himself ready to publish a number of extreme revolutionary writings together with the latter and to send them over the Russian frontier.

There is no doubt about Bakunin's responsibility for this literature and it is of no decisive importance whether he or Netchayeff was directly responsible for a number of its worst examples. And further, Bakunin's authorship has never been denied in connection with the appeal issued to the officers of the Tsarist army calling on them to place themselves at the disposal of the "committee" as unconditionally as Bakunin had done, or with the leaflet which idealized banditry in Russia, or with the so-called revolutionary catechism in which Bakunin's love of grisly ideas and fierce words was given full rein to the point of surfeit. On the other hand, it has never been proved that Bakunin had any part in Netchayeff's reckless actions. In fact he was himself one of their victims and it was his realization of them, all too late, that caused him to show "the young tiger" the door.

Both Bakunin and Netchayeff were accused by the General Council of the International of having sent innocent persons to their doom in Russia by sending them letters, material or telegrams in such a form as inevitably to draw down on them the attention of the Russian police, although Bakunin's reputation might reasonably have been expected to protect him from such accusations. After his exposure Netchayeff admitted the real state of affairs. He acknowledged openly and with the utmost impudence that it was his custom to compromise deliberately all those who were not completely in agreement with him, in order either to destroy them or to draw them into the movement completely. In accordance with the same reprehensible principles

he would, in a moment of excitement, persuade people to sign compromising declarations, or he would steal compromising letters in order afterwards to be able to exercise extortionate pressure on their authors.

When Netchayeff returned to Russia in the autumn of 1869 Bakunin had not yet learnt of these methods and Netchayeff was provided with a written authorization from Bakunin which declared that he was the "accredited representative," naturally not of the International and not even of the Alliance of Socialist Democracy, but of a European Revolutionary Alliance which Bakunin's inventive genius had founded as a sort of branch of the Alliance for Russian Affairs. This organization probably existed only on paper, but in any case, Bakunin's name was enough to secure a certain support from amongst the students for Netchayeff's agitation. His chief method of obtaining influence was still the myth of the "committee," and when one of his newly-won supporters, the student Ivanov, began to doubt the existence of this secret authority, he disposed of the inconvenient sceptic by assassination. The finding of Ivanov's body led to numerous arrests, but Netchayeff succeeded in slipping over the frontier.

At the beginning of January, 1870, he again appeared in Geneva and the old game started anew. Bakunin came forward as his fiery defender and declared that the murder of Ivanov was a political and not a common crime and that the Swiss government should therefore not grant the request of the Tsarist government for his extradition. For the moment Netchayeff kept so closely in hiding that the Swiss police could not find him, but he played his protector a nasty trick. He persuaded him to abandon the translation of the first volume of Capital in order to devote himself completely to revolutionary propaganda and promised to come to an agreement with the publisher in the question of the advance which had already been paid. Bakunin, who was living in the narrowest of straits at the time, could only assume that this promise meant that either Netchayeff or the mysterious "committee" would refund the 300 roubles advance to the publisher. However, Netchayeff sent an "official" letter on a piece of notepaper bearing the name of the "committee" and decorated with an axe, a dagger and a revolver, not to the publisher but to Liubavin, who had acted as intermediary between Bakunin and the publisher. Liubavin was forbidden to demand the repayment of the advance from Bakunin on pain of death. An insulting letter from Liubavin was the first intimation Bakunin had of the business. He immediately sent Liubavin a new acknowledgment of the debt and repeated his promise to pay it back as soon as his means permitted, and at last he broke off his relations with Netchayeff, about whom he had in the meantime discovered still worse things, such as the plot to hold up and rob the Simplon post.

The incredible, and for a political leader unpardonable, gullibility which Bakunin displayed in this, the most adventurous episode of his life, had very unpleasant results for him. Marx heard about the affair in July, 1870, and this time from an irreproachable source, namely the thoroughly reliable Lopatin, who during his stay in Geneva in May had vainly tried to convince Bakunin that no such "committee" existed in Russia, that Netchayeff had never been a prisoner in St. Peter-Paul, and that the throttling of Ivanov had been an utterly senseless murder. If anyone was in a position to know the truth it was Lopatin, and it was only natural that his information confirmed the unfavourable opinion Marx now had of Bakunin. After the Russian government had discovered the truth about Netchayeff's activities as a result of the numerous arrests which were made in connection with the murder of Ivanov, it exploited the favourable opportunity to the full, and in order to ridicule and expose the Russian revolutionaries in the eyes of the world it arranged for the first time a political trial in public and before a jury. The proceedings in the so-called

Netchayeff trial opened in St. Petersburg in July, 1871. There were over eighty accused, most of them students, and the majority of them were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment or to forced labour in the Siberian mines.

Netchayeff himself was still at liberty and he remained variously in Switzerland, London and Paris, where he went through the siege and the Commune. He fell into the hands of the police only in the autumn of 1872 – the victim of a spy. Bakunin and his friends issued a leaflet on his behalf, published by Schabelitz in Zurich, opposing his extradition as a common criminal. This action does Bakunin no dishonour and this is also true of a letter he wrote to Ogarev, a man who had also been completely deceived by Netchayeff, so much so in fact that he had handed over either wholly or in part, the Batmetiev funds which he had administered after the death of Herzen: “Something within me tells me that this time Netchayeff, who is utterly lost and certainly knows it, will retrieve all his old energy and steadfastness from the depths of his character, which may be confused and vitiated, but is not low. He will go under as a hero and this time he will betray no one and nothing.” In ten long years of suffering in a Tsarist prison up to the day of his death Netchayeff justified these expectations. He did everything he could to repair his earlier errors and maintained an iron energy which even made his warders give way to him.

The Franco-Prussian War broke out just as Bakunin had parted company with him. It immediately gave Bakunin’s ideas another direction. The old revolutionary reckoned that the invasion of France by German troops would give the signal for the social revolution in France. The French workers must not remain inactive in the face of an aristocratic, monarchist and military invasion unless they wished to betray not only their cause but the cause of socialism. A victory for Germany would be a victory for European reaction. Bakunin was right in declaring that a revolution at home need not paralyze the resistance of the French people to the foreign enemy, and he appealed to French history in particular to prove his point, but his proposals to persuade the Bonapartist and reactionary peasant class into joint revolutionary action with the urban workers were thoroughly fantastic. The peasants should not be approached with any decrees or communist proposals or organizational forms, as that would cause them to revolt against the towns, Bakunin declared. Instead one should draw the revolutionary spirit from out of the depths of their souls – and other similarly fantastic phrases.

After the fall of the Second Empire, Guillaume published an appeal in the *Solidarité* calling for the formation of armed bands of volunteers to hurry to the assistance of the French Republic. It was a downright act of folly, particularly coming from a man who had opposed with nothing short of fanaticism any participation of the International in politics, and it produced no result but laughter. However, Bakunin’s attempt to proclaim a revolutionary commune in Lyons on the 28th of September must not be placed in the same category. Bakunin had been called to Lyons by the revolutionary elements there. The Town Hall had been occupied, the “administrative and governmental machinery of the State” abolished and the “Revolutionary Federation of the Commune” proclaimed in its place, when the treachery of General Cluseret and the cowardice of a number of other persons gave the National Guard an easy victory. Bakunin had vainly urged that energetic measures should be taken and that, above all, the representatives of the government should be arrested. He was taken prisoner himself, but released almost immediately by a detachment of volunteers. He remained a few weeks in Marseilles in the hope that the movement would revive again, but when this hope proved baseless he returned at the end of October to Locarno.

The ridiculing of this unsuccessful attempt might reasonably have been left to the reaction, and an opponent of Bakunin whose opposition to anarchism did not rob him of all capacity to

form an objective judgment wrote: "Unfortunately mocking voices have been raised even in the social democratic press, although Bakunin's attempt certainly does not deserve this. Naturally, those who do not share the anarchist opinions of Bakunin and his followers must adopt a critical attitude towards his baseless hopes, but apart from that, his action in Lyons was a courageous attempt to awaken the sleeping energies of the French proletariat and to direct them simultaneously against the foreign enemy and the capitalist system. Later the Paris Commune attempted something of the sort also and was warmly praised by Marx." That is certainly a more objective and reasonable attitude than that of the Leipzig Volksstaat, which, adopting a well-used tactic, declared that the proclamation issued by Bakunin in Lyons could not have been better suited to Bismarck if it had been drawn up in the latter's own press bureau.

The failure of the movement in Lyons deeply depressed Bakunin. He had believed the revolution almost at hand; now he saw it disappear into the far future, particularly after the overthrow of the Paris Commune, which had filled him with new hope for the moment. His hatred against the revolutionary propaganda carried on by Marx increased because he thought it chiefly responsible for the indecisive attitude of the proletariat. In addition his personal situation was very pressing. He received no assistance from his brothers and there were days when he had not even five centimes in his pocket to purchase his usual cup of tea. His wife was afraid that he would lose his energy and go to seed. However, he decided to set down his opinions on the development of humanity, philosophy, religion, the State and anarchy in a work which was to be written piecemeal in his free moments and to represent his political testament.

This work was never concluded. His unruly spirit was not permitted much peace. Utin had continued his incitement in Geneva, and in August, 1870, he had secured the expulsion of Bakunin and a number of his friends from the central section in Geneva on the ground that they were members of the Alliance section. Utin had then spread the lie that the Alliance had in fact never been admitted into the International by the General Council, and that the documents in the possession of the Alliance bearing the signatures of Jung and Eccarius were forgeries. In the meantime, however, Robin had emigrated to London and had been made a member of the General Council despite the fact that he had attacked it so vigorously in *l'Egalité*. With this action the General Council gave a proof of its objectivity, for Robin had never ceased to be a sworn supporter of the Alliance. On the 14th of March, 1871, he had proposed that the International should call a private conference to settle the dispute in Geneva. On the eve of the Paris Commune the General Council had thought it desirable to reject this proposal, but on the 25th of July it decided to call a conference on the Geneva dispute for the following September. In the same session it confirmed, at the instance of Robin, the authenticity of the documents signed by Jung and Eccarius informing the Alliance of its admission to the International.

This letter had hardly arrived in Geneva when the Alliance section voluntarily dissolved on the 6th of August and informed the General Council of this step immediately. The idea was to create a good impression; after the section had been vindicated by the General Council against the lies of Utin, it sacrificed itself in the interests of peace and reconciliation. As a matter of fact, however, as Guillaume later admitted, other motives had been decisive. The Alliance section had sunk into complete unimportance and appeared, particularly to the Commune fugitives in Geneva, as nothing but the dead remnant of personal squabbles. Now Guillaume regarded these fugitives as suitable elements for the conduct of the struggle against the Federal Council in Geneva on a broader basis. Therefore the Alliance section was dissolved and its remnants united a few weeks later together with the communards in a new "Section of Revolutionary Socialist Propaganda and

Action,” which declared itself in agreement with the general principles of the International, but reserved itself the right to make full use of the freedom which the Statutes and the congresses of the International afforded.

In the beginning Bakunin had nothing to do with this at all. It is significant of his alleged omnipotence as the leader of the Alliance that its section in Geneva had not even bothered to consult him before it dissolved itself, although he was near at hand in Locarno. Yet it was not wounded sensibility, but because he felt that under the circumstances the dissolution of the section was a cowardly and underhand trick, which caused him to protest sharply: “Let us not be cowards under the pretext of saving the unity of the International.” At the same time he began to work on a detailed description of the Geneva confusion in order to demonstrate the principles which in his opinion were at stake in the dispute, and this was to serve as a guide to his supporters at the London conference.

Considerable fragments of this work are still extant and they differ very favourably from the Russian leaflets drawn up by him together with Netchayeff a year before. With the exception of one or two forceful expressions they are written calmly and objectively, and no matter what attitude one may take up to Bakunin’s particular ideas, they certainly do prove convincingly that the cause of the confusion in Geneva had deeper roots than the shifting sands of personal squabbles could have offered, and that as far as the latter played a role at all, the greater part of the responsibility rested on the shoulders of Utin and his friends.

Bakunin never for one moment denied the basic differences between himself and Marx on the question of the latter’s “State communism,” and he did not handle his opponents with kid gloves. However, Bakunin did not present Marx as a worthless fellow pursuing nothing but his own reprehensible ends. He described the development of the International from out of the masses of the people with the assistance of capable men devoted to the cause of the people and added: “We seize this opportunity of paying our respects to the famous leaders of the German Communist Party, citizens Marx and Engels in particular, and also citizen Ph. Becker (our former friend and now our irreconcilable enemy), who, as far as it is given to individuals to create, are the real creators of the International. We acknowledge their services all the more readily because soon we shall be compelled to fight against them. Our respect for them is deep and wholehearted, but it does not go so far as to idolize them, and we shall never consent to play the role of their slaves. And although we do full justice to the tremendous service which they have done and are still doing the cause of the International, nevertheless we shall fight to the hilt against their false authoritarian theories, against their dictatorial presumption and against their methods of underground intrigues and vainglorious machinations, their introduction of mean personalities, their foul insults and infamous slanders, methods which characterize the political struggles of almost all Germans and which they have unfortunately introduced into the International.” That was certainly frank enough, but Bakunin never let himself be provoked into denying the immortal services which Marx had rendered to the working-class movement as the founder and leader of the International.

However, Bakunin did not finish this work either. He was engaged on it when Mazzini published violent attacks on the Commune and on the International in a weekly publication which he issued in Lugano. Bakunin immediately came to grips with him in *The Answer of an Internationalist to Mazzini*, and when Mazzini and his supporters took up the gauntlet this was followed by other leaflets in the same tone. After all his recent failures Bakunin now enjoyed complete success: the International, which up to then had found only a very narrow foothold in Italy, began to

gain ground rapidly. This success was achieved by Bakunin not as the result of his “intrigues,” but as the result of the eloquent words with which he released the tension which the Paris Commune had caused amongst the Italian youth.

Large-scale industry was still undeveloped in Italy. The developing proletariat was awakening to class-consciousness only very slowly and it possessed no legal weapons either of offence or defence. On the other hand the struggles of half a century for national unity had developed and maintained a revolutionary tradition amongst the bourgeois classes. Innumerable insurrections and conspiracies had aimed to win national unity until finally it had been obtained in a form which necessarily represented a great disappointment to all revolutionary elements. Under the protection first of all of French and then of German arms the most reactionary State in the country had founded an Italian monarchy. The heroic struggles of the Paris Commune roused the revolutionary youth of Italy from the depression into which it had fallen. On the edge of the grave Mazzini turned away from the new light which irritated his old hatred of socialism, but Garibaldi, who was a national hero to a far greater extent, honestly welcomed the rising sun of the future” in the International.

Bakunin knew perfectly well from what sections of the population his supporters flocked, and in April 1872 he wrote: “What Italy has lacked up to the moment was not the correct instinct, but the organization and the idea. Both are now developing so rapidly that, together with Spain, Italy is perhaps at this moment the most revolutionary country. Something exists in Italy which is lacking in other countries: an ardent, energetic youth, without hope of a career, work or a solution, a youth which despite its bourgeois origin is not morally and intellectually exhausted like the bourgeois youth in other countries. To-day it is plunging head first into revolutionary socialism with our whole program, the program of the Alliance.” These lines were written by Bakunin to a Spanish supporter and were intended as encouragement to further action. However, it was no amiable illusion, but an undeniable fact when Bakunin estimated his successes in Spain, where he exercised influence only through friends and not by his presence, just as high, if not higher, than his successes in Italy.

In Spain also industrial development was still very backward and where any proletariat in the modern sense existed it was bound hand and foot, lacking all legal rights, so that all that remained to it in its desperation was the weapon of armed insurrection. The great Spanish manufacturing town Barcelona has more barricade struggles in its history than any other town in the world. In addition, long years of civil war had disturbed the country, and all revolutionary elements had been greatly disappointed, after having driven out the Bourbon dynasty in the autumn of 1868, to find themselves under the (very shaky) dominance of a foreign king. In Spain also the sparks flung into the air from the revolutionary conflagration in Paris fell on heaped up tinder. The situation in Belgium was somewhat different from the situation in Italy and Spain because in Belgium there was already a proletarian mass movement in being, although it was limited almost exclusively to the Walloon districts. The extremely revolutionary miners of the Borinage formed the backbone of this movement, and any idea of improving their class situation by legal means had been crushed in its infancy by the bloodbaths in which their strikes were drowned year after year. Their leaders were Proudhonists and therefore inclined towards the opinions of Bakunin.

If one follows the development of the Bakunist opposition in the International after the fall of the Paris Commune, one finds that it came forward under Bakunin’s name because it hoped to solve with his ideas the social antagonisms and tensions from which it really sprang.

6. The Second Conference in London

The conference which the General Council decided to call for September in London was intended to take the place of the annual congress which was about to fall due.

The congress in Basle in 1869 had decided that the next congress should take place in Paris, but the campaign of incitement which Ollivier organized against the French sections of the International to celebrate the plebiscite caused the General Council to use its authority to alter the venue of the congress, and in July 1870 it decided that the congress should be held in Mayence. At the same time the General Council proposed to the National Federations that its seat should be moved from London to some other place, but this proposal was unanimously rejected. The outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War made it impossible to hold the congress in Mayence and the Federations then instructed the General Council to convene the congress at its own discretion and in accordance with the circumstances of the moment.

The development of events made it appear undesirable to call the congress for the autumn of 1871. The pressure exerted on the members of the International in the various countries made it appear likely that they would not be able to send delegates to the congress as freely as was desirable, and that those few members who were able to attend the congress would be exposed to the visitations of their governments more than ever upon their return. The International was very unwilling to do anything which might increase the number of victims because it already had more than enough to do to assist its persecuted members, and this task made the greatest demands on its energies and its resources.

The General Council, therefore, decided that for the moment it would be better to call a closed conference in London, similar to the one which had taken place in 1865, rather than a public congress. The poor attendance at this conference completely confirmed the misgivings of the General Council. The conference took place from the 17th to the 23rd of September and only 23 delegates were present, including six from Belgium, two from Switzerland and one from Spain. Thirteen members of the General Council were also present, but six of them had only an advisory vote. Amongst the extensive and numerous decisions of the conference were a number dealing with working-class statistics, the international relations of the trade unions, and agriculture, all of which under the existing circumstances had only an academic significance. The chief tasks of the conference were to defend the International against the furious attacks of the external enemy and to consolidate it against the elements which threatened to undermine it from within, tasks which, on the whole, coincided.

The most important decision of the conference referred to the political activity of the International. It appealed first of all to the Inaugural Address, the Statutes, the decision of the Lausanne congress and other official announcements of the International declaring the political emancipation of the working class to be indissolubly bound up with its social emancipation. Then it pointed out that the International was faced with a ruthless reaction which shamelessly suppressed every effort of the working class towards its emancipation and sought by brute force to perpetuate indefinitely the class differentiation and the rule of the possessing classes based upon it. It declared that the working class could resist this violence offered to it by the ruling classes only by acting as a class, by constituting itself into a special political party against all the old party organizations of the possessing classes; that this constitution of the working class as a special political party was indispensable for the victory of the social revolution and its final aim, the abolition of all classes; and finally, that the unification of the isolated forces which the

working class had already carried out up to a point by means of its economic forces must also be used as a weapon in the struggle against the political power of the exploiters. For all these reasons the conference reminded all members of the International that the economic movement and the political movement of the fighting working class were indissolubly connected.

In organizational matters the conference requested the General Council to limit the number of members which it co-opted and at the same time not to favour one nationality more than another. The title, General Council, was to apply to it exclusively, the Federal Councils were to take their names according to the countries they represented and the local sections were to be known according to the name of their particular locality. The conference prohibited the use of any sectarian names such as Positivists, Mutualists, Collectivists and Communists. Every member of the International would continue, as previously decided, to pay one penny per year towards the support of the General Council.

For France the conference recommended vigorous agitation in the factories and the distribution of leaflets; for England, the formation of a special Federal Council to be confirmed by the General Council as soon as it had been recognized by the branches in the provinces and the trade unions. The conference declared that the German workers had fulfilled their proletarian duty during the Franco-Prussian War, and it rejected all responsibility for the so-called Netchayeff conspiracy. At the same time it instructed Utin to prepare a resumé of the Netchayeff trial from Russian sources and to publish it in *l'Egalité*, but to present it for the approval of the General Council before publication.

The conference declared that the question of the Alliance was settled, now that the Geneva section had voluntarily dissolved itself and the adoption of sectarian names, indicating a special mission apart from the general aims of the International, had been prohibited. With regard to the Jura sections, the conference confirmed the decision of the General Council of the 29th of June, 1870, recognizing the Federal Council in Geneva as the only representative body for the Latin Swiss members, but at the same time it appealed to the spirit of unity and solidarity which must inspire the workers more than ever, now that the International was being persecuted from all sides. It therefore advised the workers of the Jura sections to affiliate once again to the Federal Council in Geneva and suggested that if they found this impossible they should call themselves the Jura Federation. The conference also gave the General Council authority to disavow all alleged organs of the International which, like the *Progres* and the *Solidarité* in the Jura, discussed internal questions of the International before the bourgeois public.

Finally the conference left it to the discretion of the General Council to decide the time and place of the next congress or to replace it by a further conference.

On the whole it cannot be denied that the decisions of the conference were guided by a spirit of objective moderation. The solution it offered the Jura sections, namely to call themselves the Jura Federation, had already been considered by the sections themselves. Only the decisions with regard to the Netchayeff affair contained a personal note of hostility which could not be justified by objective considerations. Naturally, the bourgeois press exploited the revelations in the Netchayeff affair against the International, but this represented no more than the usual slanders which were flung at the International day in and day out, and there was no particular necessity to refute them. In similar cases the International had contented itself with kicking the rubbish contemptuously into the gutter, but if it wished to make an exception in the Netchayeff case it should not have chosen a hateful intriguer like Utin as its representative, a man from whom Bakunin might expect just about as much regard for truth as from the bourgeois press.

Utin began the task entrusted to him with one of his usual blood and thunder stories. In Zurich, where he intended to carry out his task and where, according to his own statement, his only enemies were a few Slav supporters of the Alliance under Bakunin's orders, eight Slavs allegedly attacked him one fine day in a quiet place near a canal. They beat him, flung him to the ground and would have finished him off completely and flung his body into the canal, but for the fact that four German students happened to come along and saved his precious life, thus making possible his future services to the Tsar.

With this one exception, the decisions of the conference undoubtedly offered the basis for an agreement, all the more so as the whole working-class movement was surrounded by enemies and internal agreement was absolutely necessary. On the 20th of October the new Section for Revolutionary Socialist Propaganda and Action, which had been formed in Geneva from amongst the remnants of the Alliance and a number of fugitive communards, approached the General Council with a request for affiliation. After the General Council had consulted the Federal Council in Geneva the request was rejected, whereupon *La Révolution Sociale*, which had taken the place of the *Solidarité*, began a vigorous attack on the "German Committee led by a brain à la Bismarck," this being in the opinion of the editors of *La Révolution Sociale* a correct description of the General Council of the International. However, this slogan quickly found an echo so that Marx wrote to an American friend: "It refers to the unpardonable fact that I was born a German and that I do in fact exercise a decisive intellectual influence on the General Council. Nota bene: the German element in the General Council is numerically two-thirds weaker than the English and the French. The crime is, therefore, that the English and French elements are dominated (!) in matters of theory by the German element and find this dominance, i.e., German science, useful and even indispensable."

The Jura sections made their general attack at a congress which they held on the 12th of November in Sonvillier, although only 9 out of 22 sections were represented by 16 delegates, and most of this minority suffered from galloping consumption. However, to make up for this they made more noise than ever. They felt deeply insulted at the fact that the London conference had forced a name on them which they had themselves already considered, but nevertheless they decided to submit and call themselves in the future the Jura Federation, whilst revenging themselves by declaring the Latin Federation to be dissolved, a decision which of course was without any practical significance. However, the chief achievement of the congress was the drafting and despatch of a circular to all the Federations of the International attacking the validity of the London conference and appealing from its decisions to a general congress to be called as quickly as possible.

This circular, which was drawn up by Guillaume, proceeded from the assumption that the International was on a fatal and downward path. Originally it had been formed as "a tremendous protest against any kind of authority," and in the Statutes each section and each group of sections had been guaranteed complete independence, whilst the General Council as an executive group had been given definitely limited powers. Gradually however, the members had come to place a blind confidence in the General Council and this had led in Basle to the abdication of the congress itself, as a result of the fact that the General Council had been given authority to accept, reject or dissolve sections, pending the decisions of the next congress. The author of the circular made no reference to the fact that this decision had been adopted after Bakunin had spoken vigorously in its favour, and with Guillaume's own approval.

The General Council, the circular continued, which had consisted of the same men and sat in the same place for five years, now regarded itself as the "legitimate head" of the International.

As in its own eyes it was a sort of government, it naturally regarded its own peculiar ideas as the official theory of the International and the only one permissible. The differing opinions which arose in other groups were regarded by the General Council as heresy pure and simple. Thus an orthodoxy had gradually developed in the International with its seat in London and its representatives in the members of the General Council. It was not necessary to complain of their intentions because they were acting according to the opinions of their own particular school, but one must fight against them vigorously because their omnipotence necessarily had a corrupting effect. It was quite impossible that a man who held such power over his equals could retain a moral character.

The London conference had continued the work of the Basle Congress and taken decisions which were intended to transform the International from a free association of independent sections into an authoritarian and hierarchical organization in the hands of the General Council. And to crown it all the conference had decided that the General Council should have power to determine the time and place of the next congress, or of a conference to replace it. Thus it was being left to the arbitrary discretion of the General Council to replace the general congresses, the great open sessions of the International, by secret conferences. Therefore it had become necessary to limit the powers of the General Council to the fulfilment of its original mission, namely that of a simple bureau for correspondence and the collection of statistics, and to obtain by the free association of independent groups that unity which the General Council wished to establish by means of dictatorship and centralization, In this respect the International must be the precursor of the future society.

Despite the gloomy colours in which it painted the situation, or perhaps just because of them, this circular of the Jura sections did not achieve its real aim. Even in Belgium, Italy and Spain its demand for the calling of a congress as quickly as possible met with no support. In Spain the sharp attacks on the General Council gave rise to the suspicion that jealousy between Marx and Bakunin was behind it all. In Italy the members felt no more inclined to let themselves be ordered about by the Jura than by London. Only in Belgium was a decision adopted for an alteration of the Statutes of the International, in the sense that the latter should declare itself expressly an association of completely independent federations and its General Council as “a Centre for Correspondence and Information.”

To make up for this lack of appreciation, however, the circular of Sonvillier was welcomed enthusiastically by the bourgeois press, which pounced on it as a rare tidbit. All the lies which it had spread, particularly since the fall of the Paris Commune, about the sinister power of the General Council were now confirmed from within the ranks of the International. The Bulletin Jurassien, which in the meantime had taken the place of the short-lived *Révolution Sociale*, had at least the pleasure of printing enthusiastic articles of approval from the bourgeois newspapers.

The noisy echo of the Sonvillier circular caused the General Council to issue an answer to it, also in the form of a circular, entitled: *Les prétendues Scissions dans l'Internationale*.

7. The Disintegration of the International

As far as the circular of the General Council dealt with the accusations made in Sonvillier and other places on account of alleged violations or even falsification of the Statutes, fanatical

intolerance and similar accusations, it conducted a thoroughly victorious polemic and one can only regret that for the greater part it was wasted on quite unimportant matters.

To-day it is necessary to overcome a good deal of reluctance in order to bother one's head at all about such insignificant affairs. For instance, when the International was founded its Paris members had omitted a phrase from its Statutes in order to avoid trouble with the Bonapartist police. One passage of the Statutes read that all political movements of the working class must subordinate themselves as a means to securing the economic emancipation of the working class. The expression "as a means" had been left out in the French text. The situation was perfectly clear, but again and again the lie was spread to the point of surfeit that the General Council had afterwards interpolated the expression "as a means." And when the London conference acknowledged that the German workers had done their proletarian duty during the Franco-Prussian War, this was used as an excuse for the accusation of "Pan-Germanism," which was alleged to dominate the General Council.

The circular tore these ridiculous charges to pieces, and when one considers that they were brought forward in order to undermine the centralization of the International although the maintenance and consolidation of this centralization was the only possibility of saving the tottering organization from succumbing to the attacks of the reaction, it is easy to understand the bitterness of the concluding passages of the circular which accuse the Alliance of playing into the hands of the international police. "It proclaims anarchy in the ranks of the proletariat as the infallible means of breaking the powerful concentration of political and social forces in the hands of the exploiters. Under this pretext and at a moment when the old world is seeking to destroy the International it demands that the latter should replace its organization by anarchy." The more the International was attacked by its external enemies, the more frivolous appeared the attacks made on it from within, particularly when those attacks were so baseless.

However, the clarity with which the General Council realized this side of the question was set off by its failure to see clearly the other side of the question. As its title indicated, the circular was prepared to admit no more than "alleged disruption" in the International. It put down the whole conflict, as Marx had already done in his Confidential Communication, to the machinations of "certain intriguers," and in particular Bakunin. It brought forward the old accusations against him in connection with "the equalization of the classes" and in connection with the Basle congress, etc., and accused him of having been responsible together with Netchayeff for betraying innocent people to the Russian police. It also devoted a special passage to the fact that two of his supporters had turned out to be Bonapartist police spies, a fact which was certainly extremely unpleasant for Bakunin, but no more compromising for him than it was for the General Council when, a few months later, it suffered the same misfortune with two of its own supporters. The circular also accused "young Guillaume" of having denounced "the factory workers" of Geneva as hateful "bourgeois," without taking the least notice of the fact that amongst the fabrique in Geneva there was a section of highly-paid workers in the luxury trades which had concluded more or less deplorable election compromises with the bourgeois parties.

However, by far the weakest point in the circular was its defence of the General Council against the accusation of "orthodoxy." It appealed to the fact that the London conference had prohibited the adoption of sectarian names by any of the sections. That was certainly justifiable in view of the fact that the International was a highly diverse conglomeration of trade union organizations, co-operatives, and educational and propaganda associations, but the interpretation the circular of the General Council placed upon this decision was highly contestable.

The circular declares: “The first stage in the struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie is characterized by the development of sects. These sects have a justifiable existence at a time when the proletariat is not sufficiently developed to act as a class. Individual thinkers begin to criticize social contradictions and seek to overcome them by fantastic solutions which the masses of the workers are expected to accept, spread and carry out. It lies in the nature of the sects which form around such pioneers that they are exclusive and that they hold themselves aloof from all practical activities, from politics, strikes, trade unions, in a word from every form of mass movement. The masses of the workers remain indifferent, or even hostile to their propaganda. The workers of Paris and Lyons wanted no more to do with the St. Simonists, Fourierists and Icarians than the English Chartists and trade unionists with the Owenites. Originally one of the levers of the working-class movement, these sects become reactionary and a hindrance immediately the movement overtakes them. Examples of this are the sects in France and England, and later on the Lassalleans in Germany, who, after having hampered the organization of the proletariat for years, have finally become simply tools in the hands of the police.” And in another passage the circular refers to the Lassalleans as “Bismarck socialists” who wear the white blouse of the Prusso-German Empire outside their police organ, *Der Neue Sozialdemokrat*.

There is no express proof that Marx drew up this circular. To judge by content and style, Engels may have had a big hand in it, but the passages on the role of sectarianism are certainly from Marx and the same ideas can be found in his contemporary correspondence with party friends, having been developed for the first time in his polemic against Proudhon. On the whole the historic significance of socialist sectarianism is aptly characterized, but Marx made a mistake when he tarred the Bakuninists, not to speak of the Lassalleans, with the same brush as the Fourierists and the Owenites.

One can judge as contemptuously of anarchism as one likes and regard it simply as a disease of the working-class movement wherever it shows itself, but it is impossible – and certainly to-day with the experiences of half a century behind us – to imagine that this disease was communicated from outside. On the contrary, it is obvious that it is a disease to which the working class shows a natural disposition and which develops in favourable, or rather unfavourable circumstances. It is difficult to understand such an error even for 1872. Bakunin was the last man to come forward with a complete and stereotyped system, and expect the workers to accept it and put it into operation without demur. Marx himself never tired of repeating that Bakunin was a cipher in theoretical matters and only in his element when intriguing, and that his program was a hodge-podge of superficial ideas collected right and left.

The decisive characteristic of all sectarianism is its hostility to all forms of the proletarian mass movement, hostile both in the sense that sectarianism has no use for such a movement and such a movement has no use for sectarianism. Even if it were true that Bakunin wished to obtain control of the International merely in order to serve his own ends, he would still have proved that as a revolutionary he reckoned with the masses. Although his struggle against Marx developed with extraordinary bitterness, he always, practically to the end, counted it Marx’s immortal service that in the International he had created the framework for a proletarian mass movement. The differences between the two referred to the tactics which this mass movement must adopt in order to achieve its aim. No matter how wrong Bakunin’s views may have been, they certainly had nothing in common with sectarianism.

And then the Lassalleans! In 1872 they were certainly not up to the full level of socialist principles, but they were superior to every other contemporary working-class party in Europe both

with regard to theoretical insight and organizational strength, not excepting the Eisenach faction, whose chief intellectual resources were still the popular writings of Lassalle. Lassalle built up his agitation on the broad basis of the proletarian class-struggle, thereby excluding any possibility of sectarianism. His successor Schweitzer was so thoroughly convinced of the indissolubility of the political and the social struggle of the proletariat that he earned the reproach of "parliamentarism" from Liebknecht. It is true that Schweitzer ignored the warnings of Marx in the trade-union question, to his own misfortune, but when the circular of the General Council was written he had been out of the movement for years whilst the Lassalleans had already begun to make good their errors in this respect, for instance, in the strikes of the building workers in Berlin. They had overcome the short interruption of their agitation caused by the war and the workers began to stream into their ranks in increasing numbers.

It is not necessary to stress particularly the attacks made by the circular on the Lassalleans, for Marx harboured an invincible dislike for Lassalle and everything Lassallean, but the connection in which these attacks were made gave them a particular significance. They threw a clear light on the real cause for the dissolution of the International, on the indissoluble contradiction which had developed in the great association after the fall of the Paris Commune. After the fall of the Commune the whole reactionary world mobilized its forces against the International, and the only way in which the latter could hope to defend itself was by centralizing its forces still more strongly. However, the fall of the Commune had proved the necessity of the political struggle, and this struggle was impossible without loosening international ties, for it could be carried on only within national frontiers.

In the last resort the demand for political abstinence, no matter how much it may have been exaggerated, arose out of a justifiable mistrust of the traps of bourgeois parliamentarism, a mistrust which was expressed in its sharpest form in Liebknecht's famous speech in 1869. In the same way the objection to the dictatorship of the General Council which developed in almost all countries after the fall of the Paris Commune arose in the last resort, apart from all exaggerations, from the more or less clear perception that a national working-class party must be guided first of all by the conditions of its existence within the nation of which it formed a part; that it could no more jump over these conditions than a man can jump over his own shadow; and that, in other words, it was not possible to lead the movement from abroad. Although Marx had already pointed out in the Statutes of the International that the political and social struggles of the working class were indissolubly connected, in practice he proceeded always from those social demands of the workers which were common to all countries with a capitalist mode of production, and he touched on political questions only when they resulted from such social demands such as the demand for the legal shortening of the working day. Political questions in the actual and direct sense of the word, for instance, questions relating to the constitution of the State, and therefore different in every country, he preferred to leave until such time as the proletariat had been educated to greater clarity by the International. It was in this sense that he had reproached Lassalle severely because the latter adapted his agitation to one particular country.

It has been suggested that Marx would have maintained this reserve much longer, but for the fact that the fall of the Paris Commune and the agitation of Bakunin forced the political question on him. That is easily possible and even probable, but in accordance with his character Marx took up the struggle immediately he was challenged. However, he failed to recognize that the problem with which he was faced could not be solved within the framework of the Statutes of the International, and that the more the International attempted to centralize its forces for the

struggle against its external enemies, the more it would suffer dissolution internally. The fact that the leading brain of the General Council regarded the most highly-developed working-class party, the most highly developed from his own point of view, and at that in his own country, as a venal police tool offered the most striking proof that the historic knell of the International had sounded.

However, this was not the only proof. Wherever national workers' parties formed, the International began to break up. What violent reproaches Schweitzer had to suffer from Liebknecht on account of his alleged lukewarmness towards the International! But when Liebknecht found himself at the head of the Eisenach faction he had to listen to the same reproaches from Engels, and he answered them as Schweitzer had answered, namely, by appealing to the German combination laws: "I wouldn't dream of risking the existence of our organization on this question at the moment." If the unfortunate Schweitzer had ever dared to use such insolent language – he never did – the "King of the Tailors," as he was called, who insisted on having "his own party," would have had to put up with much more. The formation of the Eisenach faction had delivered the first blow at the "German language section" in Geneva, and the final blow at this oldest and strongest organization of the International on the continent was given by the formation of a Swiss workers party in 1871. At the end of the year Becker was compelled to discontinue the publication of *Der Vorbote*.

In 1872, Marx and Engels had not yet recognized the real causes of the situation and they diminished their own services when they contended that the International had collapsed as the result of the machinations of one single demagogue, although in reality it could have retired from the arena in all honour after having fulfilled its share of a great historical task which had now grown beyond it. One must side with our present-day anarchists when they declare that nothing is more un-Marxist than the idea that an unusually malicious individual, a "highly-dangerous intriguer," could have destroyed a proletarian organization like the International. One cannot take the part of those orthodox believers whose skin begins to creep with horror at the suggestion that Marx and Engels might not always have dotted their i's and crossed their t's. If Marx and Engels were alive to-day they would certainly have nothing but biting contempt for the suggestion that the merciless criticism which was their sharpest weapon should never be turned against themselves.

Their real greatness does not consist in the fact that they never made a mistake, but in the fact that they never attempted to persist in a mistake for one moment after they had recognized it as such. In 1874, Engels admitted that the International had outlived its time. "A general defeat of the working-class movement such as was suffered in the period from 1849 to 1864 will be necessary before a new international, an alliance of all proletarian parties in all countries, along the lines of the old one can come into being. At present the proletarian world is too big and too diffuse." He consoled himself with the fact that for ten years the International had dominated European history in the interests of the future and that it could look back with pride on its work.

In 1878, Marx, in an English journal, attacked the contention that the International had been a failure and was now dead: "In reality the social-democratic workers' parties in Germany, Switzerland, Denmark, Portugal, Italy, Belgium, Holland and North America, organized more or less within national frontiers, represent just as many international groups. They no longer represent isolated sections, sparsely distributed over various countries and held together by a General Council on the periphery, but the working class itself in constant, active and direct connection, held together by the exchange of ideas, mutual assistance and joint aims ... Thus, far from dying

out, the International has developed from one stage to another and higher one in which many of its original tendencies have already been fulfilled. During the course of this constant development it will experience many changes before the final chapter in its history can be written.” In these lines Marx once again demonstrated his prophetic vision. At a time when the national working-class parties were only just developing, and more than a decade before the new International was formed, he foresaw its historical character, but he granted even this second form no final permanence, certain of one thing only, that new life would spring continually from the ashes of the old until the spirit of the age had fulfilled itself.

8. The Hague Congress

The circular of the General Council issued on the 5th of March had announced the calling of the annual congress for the beginning of September, and in the meantime Marx and Engels had decided to propose that the seat of the General Council should be moved to New York.

Many disputes have taken place around the necessity and the utility of this proposal and the reasons which caused it to be made. It has been considered as a sort of first-class funeral for the International. Marx had sought to cloak the fact that the International was hopelessly lost. However, this idea is in opposition to the fact that both Marx and Engels continued to support the International with all possible energy and did their utmost to keep it alive even after the General Council had moved to New York. It has also been said that Marx had grown tired of his activities on behalf of the International and wished to devote himself undisturbed to his scientific work, and this idea has received a certain amount of support from a letter written by Engels to Liebknecht on the 27th of May, 1872. He refers to a Belgian proposal to abolish the General Council altogether and adds: “As far as we are concerned we have no objection. Neither Marx nor myself will be members of it again in any case. As the situation is now we have no time for our work, and that must stop.” However, this was no more than a passing remark made in a moment of annoyance. Even if Marx and Engels had refused to be re-elected to the General Council, that was no reason for moving it to New York, whilst Marx had repeatedly refused to neglect the International in favour of his scientific work until such time as it should be securely on the right lines. It is therefore extremely unlikely that for this reason Marx had the idea of abandoning the International to its own devices during the most serious crisis of its whole existence.

We come probably nearer the truth in a letter he wrote to Kugelmann on the 29th of July: “The international congress (Hague, opens on the 2nd of September) will be a matter of life or death for the International and before I withdraw I want at least to protect it from the forces of dissolution.” Part of Marx’s plan to protect the International from “the forces of dissolution” was the moving of the General Council from London, where it was becoming more and more involved in dissensions, to New York. The Bakuninist tendencies were not represented at all in the General Council, or at the most they were so weakly represented that no danger threatened from them, but there was such confusion amongst its German, English and French members that it had been compelled to form a special subcommittee to deal with the constant disputes.

An estrangement had even taken place between Marx and two members of the General Council who had been his most loyal and capable assistants for years, Eccarius and Jung. Indeed, in May, 1872, a definite breach occurred between Marx and Eccarius. Eccarius, living in very straitened circumstances, gave notice that he was leaving his position as General Secretary of the Interna-

tional, for he considered himself indispensable and wished to secure the doubling of his modest weekly salary of fifteen shillings. However, the Englishman John Hales was elected in his stead and Eccarius unjustly blamed Marx for this, although in fact Marx had always supported him against the English. On the other hand, Marx had often rebuked Eccarius for hawking information about the internal affairs of the International around the bourgeois press, and in particular information concerning the private conference of the International in London. Jung blamed Engels and the latter's autocratic manner for the estrangement between him and Marx and there may have been some truth in this, for, since Marx now had the opportunity of daily contact with Engels, it is possible that, without any bad intentions, he no longer turned to Eccarius and Jung as much as he had done formerly. On the other hand, "the General," as Engels was nicknamed in the circle, cultivated, even according to the evidence of his best friends, an abrupt military tone, and, when it was his turn to take the chair at the meetings of the General Council, its members were usually prepared for squalls.

When Hales was elected General Secretary, a deadly enmity arose between him and Eccarius, in which the latter enjoyed the support of a section of the English members. Marx received little support from the new General Secretary. On the contrary, when an English Federation, founded in accordance with the decisions of the London conference, held its first congress in Nottingham on the 21st and 22nd of July, Hales proposed to the 21 delegates who were present that the Federation should establish contact with the other Federations not through the General Council, but direct, and that at the coming congress of the International the new Federation should support an alteration of the Statutes of the International with a view to curtailing the authority of the General Council. All this was in accordance with the Bakuninist slogan of the "endangered autonomy of the Federations." Hales withdrew the second proposal, but the first was adopted. The congress showed no inclination towards the Bakuninist program, but it certainly did towards English radicalism. For instance, it was in favour of the common ownership of the land, but not of all the means of production, which Hales also supported. Hales intrigued quite openly against the General Council and in August it was compelled to remove him from his post.

The Blanquist tendency was dominant amongst the French members of the General Council. In the two chief questions at issue, the question of political activity and the question of strict centralization, the Blanquists were perfectly reliable, but an account of their fundamental preference for revolutionary coups they threatened to become a still greater danger in the given situation, with the European reaction only waiting for a pretext to let loose all its overwhelming power against the International. In fact, Marx's anxiety that the Blanquists might gain control of the General Council was probably the strongest motive for his proposal that the council should be moved from London to New York where its international composition would be made possible and the safety of its archives guaranteed, a thing which was impossible anywhere on the continent.

Thanks to the strong representation of the Germans and the French amongst the 61 delegates at the Hague congress (which sat from the 2nd to the 7th of September) Marx had a certain majority. His opponents have accused him of having manufactured this majority artificially, but this accusation is absolutely without foundation as far as the authenticity of the mandates of the delegates is concerned. Although the congress spent about half its time examining mandates, all of them were accepted with one exception. It is true, however, that in June, Marx had written to America asking for mandates to be sent for French and German members. Some of the delegates represented sections in countries other than their own. Others used false names at the congress in order not to fall into the hands of the police, or for the same reason concealed the names of

the sections they represented. This explains the fairly large discrepancies in the figures given by various reports on the congress concerning the representation of the various countries.

Strictly speaking, only eight delegates were present representing German organizations: Bernhard Becker (Brunswick), Cuno (Stuttgart), Dietzgen (Dresden), Kugelmann (Celle), Milke (Berlin), Rittinghausen (Munich), Scheu (Württemberg) and Schuhmacher (Solingen). Marx, who was a representative of the General Council, also had one mandate each for New York, Leipzig and Mayence, whilst Engels had a mandate each from New York and Breslau. Hepner from Leipzig also had a mandate from New York, whilst Friedländer of Berlin had a mandate from Zurich. Two other delegates with German names, Walter and Swann, were in fact Frenchmen and their real names were Heddeghem and Dentraggues. Both of them were very doubtful characters and at the Hague congress Heddeghem was already a Bonapartist spy. Those of the French delegates who were Commune fugitives appeared at the congress under their own names. Frankel and Longuet supported Marx, although Ranvier, Vaillant and others were Blanquists, but the origin of their mandates was necessarily kept more or less in the dark. The General Council was represented by two Englishmen (Roach and Sexton), a Pole (Vroblevski), three Frenchmen (Serrailier, Cournet and Dupont) and Marx himself. The Communist Workers Association in London was represented by Lessner. The British Federal Council sent four delegates, including Eccarius and Hales, who began to flirt with the Bakuninists in the Hague.

The Italian Bakuninists sent no representatives to the congress. At a conference held in Rimini in August they had broken off all relations with the General Council. The five Spanish delegates, with the exception of Lafargue, were Bakuninists, as also were the eight Belgian and the four Dutch representatives. The Jura Federation sent Guillaume and Schwitzguebel, whilst Geneva remained loyal to Becker. Four delegates came from America: Serge, like Becker, was one of the most loyal supporters of Marx, Dereure, a former member of the Commune, was a Blanquist, and the third delegate was a Bakuninist, whilst the fourth mandate was the only one which was refused recognition by the congress. Denmark, Austria, Hungary and Australia were each represented by one delegate.

Stormy scenes took place even during the preliminary examination of the mandates, which lasted three days. Lafargue's Spanish mandate was vigorously opposed, but finally recognized against a few abstentions. During the discussion on a mandate which one of the sections in Chicago had given to a member living in London, one of the representatives of the English Federal Council objected that the member was not a recognized leader of the workers, whereupon Marx replied that it was rather an honour than the contrary not to be an English workers' leader, for the majority of them had sold themselves to the liberals. The mandate was confirmed, but this observation created bad blood and it was zealously exploited against Marx by Hales and his friends after the congress. Marx invariable stood by his own actions and he neither regretted the observation nor did he withdraw it. After the mandates had been scrutinized a number of communications referring to Bakunin were handed over to a committee of five for preliminary sifting. Delegates were elected to this committee who had been as little concerned as possible with the dispute about the Alliance. The German Cuno was the chairman and its other members were the Frenchmen Lucain, Vichard and Waiter-Heddeghem, and the Belgian Spingard.

The actual business of the congress began only on the fourth day with the reading of the report of the General Council. It was drawn up by Marx and read to the congress by him in German, by Sexton in English, by Longuet in French and by Abeele in Flemish. The report scourged all the acts of violence which had been committed against the International since the Bonapartist

plebiscite, the bloody suppression of the Paris Commune, the villainies of Thiers and Favre, the infamies of the French chamber, and the high treason trials in Germany; even the English government was taken to task on account of its terrorism against the Irish sections and on account of the inquiries it had caused to be made through its embassies concerning the branches of the association. The fierce campaign of the governments had been accompanied by an intense campaign of lies conducted with the full powers of the civilized world; the International had been bombarded with slanders, sensational telegrams and the insolent falsification of public documents, such as the masterpiece of infernal slander, the despatch which had described the great fire in Chicago as the work of the International. It was a wonder, declared the report, that the hurricane which had devastated the West Indies had not also been put down to the same account. As against this wild and reckless campaign the report of the General Council summed up the steady progress made by the International: its penetration into Holland, Denmark, Portugal, Ireland and Scotland, and its growth in the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Buenos Aires. The report was adopted with acclaim, and at the motion of a Belgian delegate the congress placed on record its admiration for and sympathy with all the victims of the proletarian struggle for emancipation.

The discussion on the General Council then began. Lafargue and Serge justified its existence on the basis of the class struggle: the daily struggle of the working class against capitalism could not be conducted effectively without a central body. If no General Council existed it would be necessary to create one. The chief speaker for the opposition was Guillaume, who denied the necessity for a General Council except as a central office for correspondence and statistics and without any authority. The International was not the invention of a clever man in possession of an infallible political and social theory, but in the opinion of the Jura representatives it had grown out of the conditions of working-class existence and these conditions offered sufficient guarantee of the unity of working-class efforts.

The discussion ended on the fifth day of the congress behind closed doors just as the discussion on the mandates had, by the way, also taken place behind closed doors. In a long speech Marx demanded not only that the previous powers of the General Council should be maintained, but even increased. The General Council should be given the right to suspend, under certain conditions, not only individual sections, but whole federations pending the decisions of the next congress. It had neither police nor soldiers at its disposal, but it could not permit its moral power to decay. Rather than degrade it to a letter-box it would be better to abolish the General Council altogether. Marx's viewpoint was carried with 36 votes against 6, 15 votes being withheld.

Engels then proposed that the General Council should be moved from London to New York. He pointed out that the removal of the council from London to Brussels had been considered on several occasions, but that Brussels had always refused, whilst the prevailing circumstances made it urgently necessary that London should be replaced by New York. The decision must be taken to move the General Council from London to New York for at least a year. The proposal caused general and for the most part unpleasant surprise. The French delegates protested against it with particular vigour, and they succeeded in securing a separate vote first on whether the seat of the General Council should be moved at all, and secondly whether it should be moved to New York. The motion that the seat of the General Council should be moved was carried with a small majority; 26 against 23 votes with 9 abstentions, whilst 30 votes then decided on New York. Twelve members of the new General Council were then elected and given the right to co-opt seven other members.

The discussion on political action was opened in the same session. Vaillant brought in a resolution in the spirit of the decision of the London conference, declaring that the working class must constitute itself its own political party independent of and hostile to all bourgeois political parties. Vaillant, and after him Longuet, appealed to the lessons of the Paris Commune, which had collapsed for want of a political program. A German delegate who supported the resolution was far less convincing when he declared that owing to his abstention from the political struggle Schweitzer had become a spy, the same Schweitzer who three years previously at the Basle congress had been denounced by the German delegates as a spy precisely on account of his "parliamentarism." Guillaume, on the other hand, pointed to the happenings in Switzerland, where at the elections the workers had concluded election alliances with Tom, Dick and Harry, sometimes with the radicals and sometimes with the reactionaries. The Jura sections wanted to have nothing to do with such trickery. They also were politicians, but negative politicians. They wanted to destroy political power, not to conquer it.

The discussion lasted until the next day, the sixth and last day of the congress, which began with a surprise. Ranvier, Vaillant and the other Blanquists had already left the congress on account of the decision to remove the General Council to New York, and in a leaflet which they issued shortly afterwards they declared: "Called upon to do its duty, the International collapsed. It fled from the revolution over the Atlantic Ocean." Serge took the chair in place of Ranvier. Vaillant's proposal was then adopted with 35 against 6 votes, 8 votes being withheld. A section of the delegates had already left for home, but most of them had left written declarations that they were in favour of the resolution.

The last hours of the last day of the congress were taken up with the report of the committee of five on Bakunin and the Alliance. It declared with four votes against one (that of the Belgian member) that it considered it as proved that a secret Alliance had existed with statutes directly contrary to the statutes of the International, but that there was not sufficient evidence to prove that the Alliance still existed. Secondly, it was proved by a draft of the statutes and by letters of Bakunin that he had attempted to form, and had perhaps succeeded in forming, a secret society within the International with statutes differing fundamentally from the statutes of the International both politically and socially. Thirdly, Bakunin had adopted fraudulent practices in order to obtain possession of the property of others, and in order to release himself from his just obligations, either he or his agents had used intimidation. Upon these grounds the majority of the committee then demanded the expulsion of Bakunin, Guillaume and a number of their supporters from the International. Cuno, who gave the report on behalf of the committee, did not put forward any material evidence, but declared instead that the majority of the committee had reached the moral certainty that their conclusions were correct, and asked for a vote of confidence from the congress.

Called upon by the chairman to defend himself, Guillaume, who had already refused to appear before the committee, declared that he would make no attempt to defend himself as he was unwilling to take part in a farce. The attack, he declared, was not directed against a number of individuals, but against the federalist tendencies as a whole. The representatives of those tendencies, as far as they were still present at the congress, had been prepared for this and had already drawn up an agreement of solidarity. This agreement was then read to the congress by a Dutch delegate. It was signed by five Belgian, four Spanish and two Jura delegates and by an American and a Dutch delegate. In order to avoid any split in the International the signatories declared themselves willing to maintain all administrative relations with the General Council,

whilst rejecting any interference on its part in the internal affairs of the Federations, providing such interference did not refer to violations of the general Statutes of the International. In the meantime the signatories appealed to all federations and to all sections to prepare themselves for the next congress in order to carry the principle of free association (*autonomie fédérative*) to victory. The congress was not prepared to negotiate on the point, but expelled Bakunin immediately with 27 against 7 votes, 8 votes being withheld, and then Guillaume with 25 against 9 votes, 9 votes being withheld. The further expulsion proposals of the committee were rejected, but it was instructed to publish its material on the Alliance.

This concluding scene of the Hague congress was certainly unworthy of it. Naturally, the congress could not know that the decisions of the majority of the committee were invalid because one member was a police spy. It would at least have been understandable if Bakunin had been expelled for political reasons, as a result of the moral conviction that he was an incorrigible mischief-maker and without being able to prove all his machinations in black and white; but that the congress attempted to rob him of his good name in questions of *meum et tuum* was inexcusable and, unfortunately, Marx was responsible for this.

Marx had obtained the alleged decision of an alleged "revolutionary committee" threatening Liubavin with death should he insist on the re-payment of the advance of 300 roubles paid through his good offices to Bakunin by a Russian publisher for the translation of the first volume of *Capital*. The actual text of this precious document has never become known, but when Liubavin, now himself a bitter enemy of Bakunin, sent it to Marx he wrote: "At the time it seemed to me that Bakunin's share in the despatch of the letter was undeniable, but to-day, on cooler consideration of the whole affair, I realize that the letter proves nothing against Bakunin, for it might have been written by Netchayeff without his knowledge." This was in fact the truth, but merely on the basis of this letter, whose addressee himself considered it not sufficiently incriminating as far as Bakunin was concerned, the latter was accused by the Hague congress of a contemptible piece of roguery.

Although Bakunin repeatedly recognized his obligation in connection with the advance and promised to pay it back in one way or the other, it would appear that his constant financial troubles never permitted him to do so. In the whole dismal affair nothing was heard from the only injured party, namely the publisher, who appears to have accepted his fate with philosophic resignation as one which is only too common in his profession. How many authors, including many of the most famous, have not at some time or other found themselves in the position of having spent their advance and unable to perform the promised work? That is certainly far from praiseworthy, but for all that it is an exaggeration to demand the culprit's head on a charger.

9. Valedictory Twinges

Despite the efforts of Marx and Engels to keep it alive, the history of the First International closed with the Hague congress. They did their utmost to facilitate the task of the new General Council in New York, but it failed to secure a firm footing on American territory. Numerous dissensions between the various sections existed in America also and the movement lacked experience and connections, intellectual forces and material means. The life and soul of the new General Council was Sorge, who was well acquainted with American conditions and had opposed the removal of the Council to New York. After first refusing he had then accepted his election as

General Secretary, for he was much too conscientious and loyal to fail the International when his services were required.

It is always a disagreeable matter to use diplomatic methods in proletarian affairs. Marx and Engels had feared with good reason that their proposal to move the General Council from London to New York would meet with vigorous resistance from the German, French and English workers, and they had concealed their intentions as long as possible in order not to add to the already numerous points of contention. However, the fact that they were successful in surprising the Hague congress nevertheless had evil consequences. The resistance they had feared was not diminished thereby, but rather intensified and embittered.

The Germans offered, comparatively speaking, the least violent resistance. Liebknecht was against the moving of the General Council and he always declared it to have been a mistake, but at the time he was in prison with Bebel in the Hubertusburg. His interest in the International had greatly diminished and this was still more the case with regard to the majority of the Eisenach faction. And the impression brought back from the Hague congress by the delegates of this faction rather increased the general lack of interest. Writing on the 8th of May, 1873, to Sorge, Engels declared: "Although the Germans have their own squabbles with the Lassalleans, they were very disappointed with the Hague congress where they expected to find perfect harmony and fraternity in contrast to their own wranglings, and they have become very disinterested." This is probably the rather unsatisfactory reason why the German members of the International did not offer any very energetic resistance to the moving of the General Council.

Much more serious was the secession of the Blanquists, upon whom, next to and with the Germans, Marx and Engels reckoned in the decisive questions at issue, in particular for support against the Proudhonists, the other French faction, whose whole attitude made them tend towards the Bakuninists. The bitterness of the Blanquists was intensified by their realization that the decision to move the General Council to New York had been taken in order to prevent them obtaining control of it in support of their putsch tactics. However, they cut off their noses to spite their faces, for since France was closed to their agitation they soon fell victim to the usual fate of emigrants after they had parted company with the International. Writing to Serge on the 12th of September, 1874, Engels declared: "The French emigrants are completely at sixes and sevens. They have quarrelled amongst themselves and with everyone else for purely personal reasons, mostly in connection with money, and we shall soon be completely rid of them ... The irregular life during the war, the Commune and in exile has demoralized them frightfully, and only hard times can save a demoralized Frenchman." But that was very small consolation.

The removal of the General Council to New York exercised the worst effect on the movement in England. On the 18th of September Hales moved a vote of censure against Marx in the British Federal Council on account of his statement concerning the venality of the English working-class leaders. The vote of censure was adopted, whilst an amendment to the effect that Marx had not believed the accusation himself but had made it merely to serve his own ends, was rejected, the vote being tied. Hales also gave notice that he intended to present a resolution for the expulsion of Marx from the International, whilst another member gave notice for a resolution rejecting the decisions of the Hague congress. Hales then openly continued the relations with the Jura Federation which he had secretly established at the Hague. Writing in the name of the Federal Council on the 6th of November he declared that the hypocrisy of the old General Council had now been exposed. It had attempted to organize a secret society within the International on the pretext of destroying another secret society which it had invented to suit its aims. At the same

time, however, he pointed out that the English were not in agreement with the Jura Federation politically. They were convinced of the usefulness of political action, but were naturally prepared to grant complete autonomy to all other federations as demanded by the differing conditions in the various countries.

Hales won zealous allies in Eccarius and Jung, particularly in Jung, who, after some hesitation, finally became one of the most violent opponents of Marx and Engels. Both Eccarius and Jung sinned deeply, first of all because they permitted their political judgment to be determined by personal considerations, jealousy and touchiness based on the fact that Marx paid, or appeared to pay, more attention to Engels than to them, and secondly, by the abandonment of the honourable and influential position which they had won as old members of the General Council. Unfortunately the damage they did was intensified as a result of their former position. At a number of congresses they had become known to the whole world as the most zealous and reliable interpreters of the opinions which Marx held, and when they now appealed to the toleration of the Jura Federation for these same opinions against the intolerance of the Hague decisions the dictatorial hankerings of Marx and Engels seemed to be proved beyond all doubt.

In this case also it was cold consolation to observe that the two chiefly damaged themselves. They met with vigorous resistance in the English and in particular in the Irish sections, and even in the Federal Council itself, and they then carried out a sort of coup d'état in the English branch of the International by issuing an appeal to all sections and all members, declaring that the British Federal Council was so divided against itself that further co-operation was impossible. They also demanded the calling of a congress to deal with the validity of the Hague decisions, which the appeal interpreted as meaning, not that political action was obligatory for all sections of the International – for that, declared the appeal, was the majority opinion in any case – but that the General Council should determine the policy to be pursued by each federation in its own particular country. The minority immediately replied to these machinations in a counter-appeal which seems to have been drawn up by Engels. This appeal condemned the proposed congress as illegal, but it took place nevertheless on the 26th of January, 1873. The majority of the sections decided in favour of it and they alone were represented at it.

Hales opened this congress by delivering violent attacks on the old General Council and on the Hague Congress, and he was actively supported by Jung and Eccarius. The congress unanimously condemned the Hague decisions and refused to recognize the new General Council in New York. It also declared itself in favour of a new international congress whenever a majority of the federations should declare in favour of it. Thus the split in the British Federation was complete and both remnants proved themselves powerless to take any really effective part in the general elections of 1874 which overthrew the Gladstone Ministry. Their impotence was enhanced by the intervention of the trade unions which put forward a number of candidates and succeeded for the first time in securing the election of two of them.

The sixth congress of the International which the General Council in New York called for the 8th of September in Geneva drew up, so to speak, the death certificate of the International. The Bakuninist counter-congress which took place in Geneva on the 1st of September was attended by two English delegates (Hales and Eccarius), five delegates each from Belgium, France and Spain, four delegates from Italy, one delegate from Holland and six delegates from the Jura, whilst the Marxist congress consisted for the most part of Swiss, and most of those lived in Geneva. Not even the General Council was able to send a delegate and there were no English, French, Spaniards, Belgians or Italians and only one German and one Austrian present. Becker boasted that he had

produced thirteen of the not quite thirty delegates more or less by magic in order to increase the prestige of the congress by larger numbers and to ensure that the majority should be secure. Marx was naturally not to be had for such self-deception and he frankly admitted that the congress had been “a fiasco” and advised the General Council not to stress the formal organizational side of the International for the moment, but to retain control of the centre point in New York if possible in order that it should not fall into the hands of idiots and adventurers who might compromise the cause. Events themselves and the inevitable development and complexity of things would assure the resurrection of the International in an improved form.

It was the cleverest and most dignified decision which it was possible to take under the circumstances, but unfortunately its effects were tarnished by the final blow which Marx and Engels felt it necessary to deliver at Bakunin. The Hague congress had instructed the committee of five which had proposed the expulsion of Bakunin to publish the result of its inquiries, but the committee did not do so. Whether the real reason was that “the separation of its members over various countries” prevented it, or whether it felt that its authority was not strong enough on account of the fact that one of its members had declared Bakunin not guilty whilst another had in the meantime been exposed as a police spy, can no longer be settled. The protocol commission of the Hague congress, consisting of Dupont, Engels, Frankel, le Moussu, Marx and Serrailier, therefore took over the task and a few weeks before the Geneva congress it issued a memorandum entitled: *The Alliance of Socialist Democracy and the International Workingmen’s Association*. This memorandum was drawn up by Engels and Lafargue whilst Marx’s share in the work was no more than the editing of one or two of the concluding pages, though naturally he is no less responsible for the whole than its actual authors.

Any critical examination of the Alliance pamphlet, as it came to be called for the sake of brevity, with a view to determining the correctness or otherwise of its detailed charges would demand at least as much space as the original document. However, very little is lost by the fact that this is impossible for reasons of space. In such disputes hard blows and knocks are delivered by both sides, and the quality of the Bakunist attacks on the Marxists was not such as to entitle them to complain all too bitterly when they themselves were attacked severely and occasionally unjustly.

It is quite another consideration which places this pamphlet below anything else Marx and Engels ever published. The positive side of the new knowledge, released by negative criticism, is what gives their other polemical writings their own peculiar attraction and lasting value, but the Alliance pamphlet shows nothing of this. It does not deal at all with the internal causes responsible for the decline of the International, but merely continues the line adopted in the Confidential Communication and in the circular of the General Council on the alleged disruption in the International: Bakunin and his secret Alliance had destroyed the International by their intrigues and machinations. The Alliance pamphlet is not a historical document, but a one-sided indictment whose tendentious character is apparent on every page of it. However, the German translator thought it necessary to go one better and, in the best traditions of the Attorney General, he entitled his effort: *A Complot against the International Workingmen’s Association*.

The decline of the International was caused by quite different matters than the existence of a secret Alliance within its ranks, but even so, the Alliance pamphlet does not even offer proof of the very existence of such an Alliance. Even the committee of inquiry set up by the Hague congress had to content itself with possibilities and probabilities in this connection. No matter how strongly one may condemn a man in Bakunin’s position for intoxicating himself with fantastic statutes and blood and thunder proclamations, one must, in the absence of any tangible

evidence to the contrary, assume that it was his lively imagination which played the chief role in the whole affair. However, the Alliance pamphlet made up for the lack of evidence by filling its second section with revelations provided by the worthy Utin on the Netchayeff process and on Bakunin's Siberian exile, during which the latter was declared to have made his first efforts as a common blackmailer and footpad. No evidence at all was offered in support of these accusations, and for the rest the evidence was limited to putting down without any further examination everything Netchayeff had said and done to Bakunin's account.

The Siberian chapter in particular is sheer cheap sensationalism. The Governor of Siberia at the time when Bakunin was living there in banishment was said to be a relative of the latter, and thanks to this connection and to the other services which he had rendered to the Tsarist government, the banished Bakunin had become a sort of "secret regent" and misused his power, in consideration for "moderate bribes," to favour capitalist undertakings. This greed for money, however, had occasionally been curbed by Bakunin's "hatred of science," as for instance when he prevented Siberian merchants from founding a university in their country, for which purpose they needed the permission of the Tsar.

Utin embroidered and embellished the story of Bakunin's attempt to borrow money from Katkoff with particular artistry. This was the same story with which Borkheim had tried to influence Marx and Engels years before without success. According to Borkheim Bakunin had written from Siberia to Katkoff in order to borrow a few thousand roubles for his flight. According to Utin, however, Bakunin had tried to borrow this money only after his safe arrival in London, his intention being to salve his troubled conscience by paying back the bribes he had received during the Siberian banishment from a manufacturer of spirits there. In the last resort, of course, that was a feeling of remorse, but to Utin's horror Bakunin could give expression to this, so-to-speak, human emotion only by borrowing from a man whom he knew to be "an informer and literary bushranger in the pay of the Russian government." This was the dizzy height to which Utin's fantasy rose, but it was by no means exhausted thereby.

At the end of October, 1873, he went to London to report "still more astonishing things" about Bakunin, and on the 25th of November Engels wrote to Sorge: "The fellow (Bakunin) has made good practical use of his precious Catechism. For years he and his Alliance have been living exclusively from blackmail, relying on the fact that nothing can be published without compromising people who are entitled to consideration. You have no idea what a despicable pack of scoundrels they are." Fortunately by the time Utin arrived in London the Alliance pamphlet had already seen the light of day for several weeks so that the "still more astonishing things" were kept locked up in his truth-loving bosom and he then proceeded to throw himself penitently at the feet of the Little Father, as a result of which he increased his income from the spirits trade by war-profiteering.

It is the Russian section in which the Alliance pamphlet culminates which did most to destroy its political effects. Even those Russian revolutionaries whose relations to Bakunin were strained were repulsed by the pamphlet. Whilst Bakunin's influence on the Russian movement in the seventies remained unimpaired, Marx lost much of the sympathy which he had won in Russia. The one success which the pamphlet achieved proved to be a blow in the air, for although it caused Bakunin to withdraw from the struggle it did not touch the movement which bore his name.

Bakunin answered the Alliance pamphlet first of all in a declaration sent to *Le Journal de Geneve*. It revealed the deep bitterness which the attacks of the pamphlet had caused in him, and

he demonstrated their baselessness by pointing out that two police spies had been members of the Hague committee which had drawn up the charges. In reality only one member had been a police spy. He then pointed out that he was already sixty years old and that heart disease was making it more and more difficult for him to take part in public life: "Let the younger ones go forward. As far as I am concerned I have no longer the strength, and perhaps no longer the necessary confidence, to continue rolling the stone of Sisyphus against the everywhere triumphant reaction. I am therefore withdrawing from the conflict, and from my worthy contemporaries I demand only one thing: oblivion. From now on I shall disturb no one; let no one disturb me." Whilst he accused Marx of having turned the International into the instrument of his personal revenge, he nevertheless still gave him credit for having been one of the founders of "a great and fine association."

In a letter of farewell which he addressed to the workers of the Jura, Bakunin spoke more severely against Marx, but more objectively. He declared that the socialism of Marx no less than the diplomacy of Bismarck represented the centre of the reaction against which the workers must carry on a terrible struggle. In this letter also he explained his retirement from the struggle by declaring that his age and sickness would make his efforts more of a hindrance than a help to the workers, and he justified his retirement with the fact that the two congresses in Geneva had demonstrated the victory of his cause and the defeat of that of his enemies.

Naturally, the reasons of health advanced by Bakunin for his retirement were mocked at as excuses, but the few years which he still lived in bitter poverty and great suffering showed that his strength had really been broken. The confidential letters to his intimate friends show that he had "perhaps" lost confidence in the speedy victory of the revolution. He died on the 1st of July, 1876 in Berne. He deserved a happier death and a better obituary than he received in numerous working-class circles, though not in all, for he fought bravely and suffered much for the cause of the working class.

With all his mistakes and weaknesses, history will give him a place of honour amongst the pioneers of the international proletariat, though that place may be contested so long as there are Philistines in the world, whether they conceal their long ears under the nightcap of petty-bourgeois respectability or don the lion's skin of a Marx to cloak their trembling limbs.

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Franz Mehring
The Bakunin-Marx split in the 1st International
1918 (in German)

Retrieved on Mar 2, 2015 from <http://libcom.org/library/bakunin-marx-split-1st-international-franz-mehring>

Excerpts from Mehring's *Karl Marx - The Story of His Life* (1918) on the conflict between Bakunin and Marx in the 1st International (International Working Men's Association). Mehring gives a very evenhanded account of the famous split that was to initially define the historical relationship between the statist and anti-statist wings of the working class movement. Unlike most other Marxists up to the present - and whilst maintaining his political disagreements with

Bakunin's anarchism and criticising his faults and weaknesses - Mehring without bias also points out the slanders, intrigues and trickeries of Marx and his supporters in this episode. The

full text of Mehring's book is available at:

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/mehring/1918/marx>

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