

Translator's Introduction: Marie Korn (Goldsmith) was a frequent contributor to the anarcho-syndicalist newspaper *Golos Truda* [The Voice of Labour], organ of the Unions of Russian Workers of the United States and Canada, published in New York City from 1911 to 1917. In the following article from the summer of 1915, she displays her polemical style, exposing the hypocrisy of Marx and Engels at the time of the Franco-Prussian War (1870), and drawing the appropriate conclusions for the current conflict (World War I). Despite publishing her article, the editors of *Golos Truda* added a disclaimer in which they chided Goldsmith for moving too close to the “social-patriots” of the left in France, rather than following Bakunin’s revolutionary internationalism, with its emphasis on defeating the internal enemy (the bourgeoisie) before confronting the external enemy (German imperialism).

Footnotes are by the translator, unless otherwise marked.

Maria Korn

Marx, Bakunin, and the War

Not long ago a small book was published in Paris by James Guillaume entitled **Karl Marx – Pan-Germanist**.¹ Guillaume was an old friend and comrade of Bakunin in the International, and in recent years has been an active participant in the French syndicalist movement. This book, written before the War, was originally intended to serve as the preface to accounts of the trials of the Paris branch of the International (1868–1870)² which were to be published by the syndicalist newspaper *La Vie ouvrière*, edited by Monatte.³ This newspaper was shut down at the beginning of the War, and Guillaume published his preface separately. Developing events made the book rather topical, and it caused a sensation not just in the socialist world, but even among the wider public, and provoked lively objections from the social-democrats. It’s interesting that a similar sort of polemic is taking place now between SRs and SDs, thanks to articles in the newspapers *Mysl* and *Zhizn*.⁴ Clearly this issue could not be more timely, and is a matter of concern to many people.

The views of Marx on the Franco-Prussian War were expressed, on the one hand, in the official pronouncements of the General Council of the International (always composed by him) and, on the other hand, in letters to friends, to Engels especially. But a great difference is apparent between the two types

¹ James Guillaume, **Karl Marx, pangermaniste, et l’Association internationale des travailleurs de 1864 à 1870**, (Paris, 1915).

² Members of the Paris branch of the 1st International were prosecuted repeatedly under articles of the Penal Code making any association of more than 20 people subject to government approval and severely repressing any union attempting industrial action or wage agitation.

³ Pierre Monatte (1881–1960) founded *La Vie Ouvrière* in 1909 as the organ of the syndicalist Confédération générale du travail (CNT).

⁴ *Mysl* [Thought] was a political, social, and literary newspaper published by the Russian Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries in Paris in 1914–1915. *Zhizhn* [Life] was a similar newspaper published by the internationalist wing of the same party in 1915, first in Paris, then in Geneva.

of communication. Marx's public statements were always the product of precise calculations, couched in carefully thought-out, diplomatic language. He expressed himself openly in personal correspondence and was terribly upset if any of these letters happened to appear in print owing to the naïveté of certain comrades. That's why his correspondence with Engels is especially valuable.

In Marx's letters, reproduced in Guillaume's book, one already finds in embryonic form those views which subsequently led German social-democracy to its present attitude on the War. It would, of course, be slanderous to ascribe to Marx anything like the imperialist aspirations of contemporary German social-democrats; but the desire for the hegemony of Germany is quite apparent in Marx. This hegemony was important to the highest degree for the fate of socialism. Here is what he wrote to Engels right before the beginning of the Franco-Prussian War (July 20, 1870):

“The French need a thrashing. If the Prussians win, the centralisation of state power will be useful for the centralisation of the German working class. German predominance would also transfer the centre of gravity of the workers' movement in Western Europe from France to Germany, and one has only to compare the movement in the two countries from 1866 till now to see that the German working class is superior to the French both theoretically and organisationally. Their predominance over the French on the world stage would also mean the predominance of our theory over Proudhon's, etc.”

Clearly, Marx considered that the annihilation of the French tendency in socialism could be effected by physically destroying the bearers of this tendency. In fact a long process was set in motion whereby German social-democratism attained dominance in international socialism, a process which has extended to the present time. But it's difficult to say whether this was a consequence of Bismarck's victories, or of the suppression of the Paris Commune. Likely the internal defeat played a greater role than the external one.

Be that as it may, Marx at that time considered the war with France to be a “national” war, and expressed his opposition to the annexation of Alsace and Lorraine, not from a principled point of view, like Liebknecht and Bebel, but from the point of view of its benefit to the German state: *“This will be disastrous for Germany and protract the war. . . because France will enter into an alliance with Russia in order to fight Germany.”* (Letter to Engels of 17 August and reply to the Brunswick Committee of the Social-Democratic Party).⁵

On 4 September, 1870, on the day when the republic was announced in France, the Paris members of the International issued the following “Appeal to the German People”:

⁵ The Brunswick Committee of the German Social-Democratic Party had asked Marx to spell out for them the position of the German working class with regard to the Franco-Prussian War.

“The person who provoked this fratricidal war and is now in your hands⁶ no longer exists for us. Republican France invites you, in the name of justice, to recall your troops; otherwise we shall fight to the last person and shed our own blood and yours.

*“We shall repeat to you what we said to the European coalition which opposed us in 1793: **the French people do not make peace with an enemy occupying our territory . . .***

“Go back across the Rhine.

“From both banks of the disputed river let Germany and France extend hands to each other. Let us forget the crimes which our tyrants forced us to commit against one another . . .

“Let our union be the basis of a United States of Europe.

“Long live the worldwide Republic!”

How did Marx and Engels relate to this appeal?

Marx wrote to Engels on 10 September about the “Paris fools”: *“They have sent me piles of their absurd chauvinistic manifesto, which the English workers here greeted with derision and indignation . . . And furthermore, these fellows take the liberty of sending me instructions by telegraph on how I must set about agitating in Germany!”*

And here is the opinion of Engels: *“These people, having endured Napoleon for 20 years . . . now that German victories have made them the present of a Republic (and how!), have the audacity to demand that the Germans immediately vacate the sacred soil of France, otherwise “War to the death!” This is all old bravado: the superiority of France, a land consecrated by 1793 which no subsequent French indecencies can profane, of the sanctity of the word: the Republic. . . .”* And he concludes with the hope that the French will reflect on the matter, because otherwise it would be difficult to have relations with them at the International level (letter to Marx of 7 September).

The two founders of social-democracy were somewhat better disposed to the proclamation of the Brunswick Committee, composed more or less in the same spirit as the “Appeal,” namely in favour of peace between both peoples. In response to this proclamation, Marx sent “instructions” to the Brunswickers in which, among other things, he explained that the German victories were a great boon because now the German working class was destined to play a major historical role, the centre of gravity of the European labour movement had shifted to Germany, etc.

⁶ Napoleon III was captured by the German Army on September 2, 1870.

Thus both Marx and Engels, on the one hand, rejoiced in the German victories and, on the other hand, were opposed to appeals for peace on the part of socialists of both countries. What exactly did they want, and what program were they proposing? Relative to Germany this program remained in the shadows; all one can say is that they were against any attempts at revolution (letters of Engels of 15 August and 7 September, letter of Marx of 17 August). As concerns France, they gave the French workers very definite advice – along the lines of avoiding any revolution. Marx and Engels laughed at the French socialists for proposing peace to the German people, but, at the same time, they were resolutely against the French workers taking matters into their own hands by finishing the internal upheaval in France and engaging in war with the external conqueror. What did they really want at that moment – peace or war? They wanted peace, but on condition that it be produced by Bismarck and accepted by the French bourgeoisie, and not as the result of revolutionary uprisings by both peoples. In the name of the General Council (through Dupont, its corresponding secretary for France), Marx issued Machiavellian instructions to the French workers, instructions up to his usual standard in dealing with opponents. *“The role of the workers and in fact their duty under the prevailing conditions,”* wrote Dupont to the correspondent of the General Council in Lyon, Albert Richard, *“is to allow the bourgeois scum to make peace with the Prussians (since the disgrace of this act will leave an indelible stain), and not to strengthen the bourgeoisie with revolts, but rather to make use of those freedoms which the circumstances have made available in order to organize the working class”* (Letter of 6 September). In exactly the same manner, in an appeal of the General Council of 9 September, Marx advised the French workers to be “calm” and “sober-minded” and “not be carried away by memories of 1792.” Their task, in his opinion, was limited to class interests, narrowly defined. *“Any attempt at upsetting the new government in the present crisis, when the enemy is almost knocking at the doors of Paris, would be a desperate folly. The French workmen must perform their duties as citizens; but, at the same time, they must not allow themselves to be swayed by the national souvenirs [memories] of 1792, as the French peasants allowed themselves to be deluded by the national souvenirs of the First Empire. They have not to recapitulate the past, but to build up the future. Let them calmly and resolutely improve the opportunities of republican liberty, for the work of their own class organization.”*

It’s rather difficult to comprehend how Marx combined what we now call “pure economism”⁷ with the supposedly beneficial consequences for socialism from the German victories. James Guillaume, it’s true, gives a very simple – perhaps too simple – explanation: *“Is it not clear,”* he writes, *“that Marx and Engels . . . simply wanted Bismarck to finish his job by taking Paris without encountering any resistance from the French proletariat?”* But it’s difficult to attribute such a degree of jesuitry even to Marx. In any case, however one explains this contradiction, one thing is interesting: Marx, who always plumped for participation in politics wherever this took the form of parliamentary activity, and tried to impose this participation on the whole International, showed himself to be a “pure economist” as soon as the political struggle threatened to be transformed into a revolutionary struggle. On the other hand, the French socialists, and generally the federalists of the International, who always advocated abstention

⁷ “Economism” refers to limiting the class struggle of workers to workplace demands with the rejection of political action. The term did not come into use until the 1890s when it was used by Marxists like Lenin in a pejorative sense to attack other currents on the left.

from parliamentary politics, prepared an uprising with the goal of overthrowing the government which had concluded peace. Once this internal revolt was completed, they intended to repel the invasion with the whole force of popular enthusiasm. In these contrasting approaches, as in other respects, there is brought into stark relief the opposition of two basic points of view, personified in that era by two towering personalities – Marx and Bakunin.

Bakunin did not propose to win by means of French arms a victory for that “Proudhonian” socialism which Marx so wanted to annihilate. But he considered the defense of France from Prussian troops to be necessary, despite that fact that the war had been directly provoked by Napoleon, not Bismarck, and that the majority of French socialists were more or less indifferent to the German victories. They began to insist on a “war to the end” only after September 4, and then they were joined by the whole federalist wing of the International.⁸ But Bakunin already on August 23, i.e. when the Empire was still in existence, had written to Richard in Lyon that the French government was deceiving and betraying France, and that France could be saved from ruin only by a national insurrection. “*Paris and France can be saved only by an immense popular uprising. People everywhere have to take arms and organise themselves in order to begin a war of destruction, a war of knives. . . . It is necessary to vanquish the Prussians inside the country before we can march with confidence and security against the Prussians outside the country. The patriotic movement of 1793 is nothing compared to what we must do now, if we are to save France from 50 years of slavery, misery, ruin, debasement, and annihilation.*”⁹ “*The normal means – the regular army – can not save France; its salvation lies only in a popular revolt,*” he wrote in the first of his ***Letters to a Frenchman***. This call for revolution on patriotic grounds, for the elimination of government with the aim of transferring the defense of the country to the hands of the people, was characteristic not just for Bakunin, but for the whole revolutionary movement of that time in France; this tendency was also apparent in the Commune.

In the same ***Letters to a Frenchman***, Bakunin explains why he, an internationalist, is calling for war:

“Ah! If France were invaded by an army of proletarians – Germans, English, Belgians, and Italians – carrying the flag of revolutionary socialism and announcing to the world the final emancipation of labour and the proletariat, I would have been the first to cry to the workers of France: “Open your arms to them, they are your brothers. Unite with them to sweep away the putrid remains of the bourgeois world!” But the invasion that dishonours France today is not a democratic and social invasion, it is a aristocratic, monarchical, and military invasion. The five or six hundred thousand German soldiers who are annihilating France at this hour are the obedient subjects, in fact the slaves, of a despot who is entirely infatuated with his divine right. They are directed, ordered, and driven like robots by officers and generals sprung from the most insolent nobility in the world; they are – ask your brothers, the German workers, about this – the fiercest enemies of the proletariat. By receiving them peacefully, remaining

⁸ See the appeal placed in the Swiss newspaper ***Solidarita*** and cited in James Guillaume’s major work: **L’Internationale : documents et souvenirs**,” Vol. 2, p. 81. In the same place are found Bakunin’s letters. [*Maria Korn’s note.*]

⁹ Lehning, Arthur, *ed.*, **Michel Bakounine sur la guerre Franco-Allemande et la révolution sociale en France, 1870–1871**, (Leiden : E. J. Brill, 1977), p. 287.

*indifferent and passive in the face of this invasion of German despotism, aristocracy, and militarism on the soil of France, the French workers would not only betray their own dignity, their own freedom, their own well-being, with all their hopes for a better future, but they would also betray the cause of the proletariat of the whole world, the sacred cause of revolutionary socialism. For this sacred cause requires, in the interests of the workers of all countries, that they destroy these ferocious bands of German despotism, just as they destroyed the armed bands of French despotism; to exterminate the armies of the King of Prussia and Bismarck to the last soldier, to the point that no one can leave the soil of France alive or armed.”*¹⁰

Further on Bakunin considers whether the workers want to get revenge on the bourgeoisie by standing aloof. But they had already taken their revenge for the June Days in this manner, by accepting the Napoleonic coup of December 1852 – and paid for their passivity with 20 years of oppression. *“To take revenge on oneself to the profit of those upon whom one proposes to take revenge does not make much sense to me, which is why I can not believe in the credibility of the reports of German correspondents [writing that the French workers are reconciled to the victory of Prussia – MK]. Can the intelligent workers of Paris be ignorant of the fact that the final victory of the Prussians will mean misery and the enslavement for the French proletariat that is much worse than the humiliation and ruin of the French bourgeoisie?”* And Bakunin goes on to prove that the bourgeoisie always arranges things, especially by increasing the poverty of the working class, so that the proletariat is doomed to slavery. But he expresses the hope that the workers will reject apathy and take up arms (arms which the government does not want to give them) and be buried in the ruins of Paris rather than allow the German emperor to enter their own capital.¹¹

A little later Bakunin writes:

“I am convinced that the subjugation of France, and the final triumph of a Germany that is subservient to the Prussians, will make all of Europe fall into the darkness, misery, and slavery of past centuries. I am so convinced of this, that I think that today is the day when every man who loves freedom, wants humanity to triumph over brutality, and wants the emancipation of his own country, whether he is English, Spanish, Italian, Polish, Russian, or even German, has a sacred duty to take part in this democratic struggle of the French people against the invasion of German despotism.”

These thoughts pervaded all of Bakunin’s writings relating to the time of the war of 1870. Everywhere he called on the workers of France to take part in the war for the sake of battling with oppression, while Marx was calling for just the opposite – for indifference to the war for the sake of narrow class interests. Anarchism and social-democracy clearly were opposed to one another right from the beginning . . .

¹⁰ Lehning, Arthur, *ed.*, **Michel Bakounine sur la guerre Franco-Allemande et la révolution sociale en France, 1870–1871**. (Leiden : E. J. Brill, 1977), pp. 67-68.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

Now, 44 years later, the same questions stand before us. And that's why it's so interesting to read what was written in those days by the founders of both camps of socialism; the arguments over this historical past have been intense ever since. And yet how contemporary the discussion is – right down to the smallest details! Bakunin's words about taking vengeance on the bourgeoisie at one's own expense is the appropriate response to the proclamation of Domela Nieuwenhuis,¹² published in one of the issues of *Golos Truda*. And Bakunin's whole argument is well-suited to countering the position occupied in our times by the majority of Russian comrades. The relative positions of the parties in this debate has now changed. The social-democrats have shifted to the right, to the side of imperialism; many anarchists have also shifted (right or left?) to take a purely economic view of the workers' struggle. Whether this is progress or regression, I'm not going to get into now, but we need to know the answer no matter what our relation to the past of our movement. That's why I have dwelt on Bakunin's views in more detail than a simple exposition of James Guillaume's new book requires.

Golos truda, № 41 (June 25, 1915), p. 2; № 42 (July 2, 1915), p. 2.

Comments of the Editorial Collective of *Golos Truda*

While publishing M. Korn's article in *G[olos] T[ruda]*, we consider it necessary to mention that we are diametrically opposed to the whole campaign launched by *Bataille syndicaliste*,¹³ based on J. Guillaume's pamphlet, aimed at proving that Karl Marx was a pan-Germanist. Despite a few reservations, comrade M. Korn in general completely endorses the point of view of the French social-nationalists.¹⁴ We note in particular that like all the other accusers she is compelled to acknowledge that in his official pronouncements at the time of the [Franco-Prussian] War, Marx maintained an internationalist position.

As for the personal correspondence of Marx with Engels, it is undoubtedly very interesting from a historical point of view. But when this correspondence is approached, in the manner of the French social-patriots, with the specific goal of justifying their own nationalist, anti-German position by means of "proofs" that "German" socialism was permeated with imperialism right from the beginning, then revolutionary internationalists can not, of course, regard such historical "research" in a sympathetic light.

Comrade M. Korn does not limit herself in her article to supporting this campaign of the French social-nationalists against Karl Marx. In her efforts to justify the position of French socialists and syndicalists,

¹² An apparent reference to the **International Anarchist Manifesto on the War** (February, 1915), widely reprinted in the anarchist press and signed by 35 anarchists, including the veteran Dutch anarchist and anti-militarist F. Domela Nieuwenhuis (1846-1919).

¹³ The Paris daily newspaper *Bataille syndicaliste* was the main organ of the syndicalist Confédération générale du travail (CGT).

¹⁴ "Social-nationalists" or "social-patriots" refers to those elements of the left in France, including anarchists, who agreed to a political truce with the government, the so-called *Union sacrée*, for the duration of the War.

she tries to prove that if the imperialism of W. Heine and Südekum¹⁵ originates with Marx, then Jouhaux and Charles-Albert¹⁶ with their social-patriotism are the true followers of Bakunin. But comrade M. Korn's efforts result in directly contradictory results. It's sufficient to point to her citation from Bakunin's letter to Richard, in which Bakunin says that France can be saved only by means of a "gigantic popular revolt . . . It's necessary to overthrow the **internal** Prussians [*our emphasis*], then proceed calmly and confidently against the external Prussians."

This letter, it's true, was written two weeks before the Empire was toppled. But anyone with the slightest knowledge of Bakunin's views can have no doubts that by "internal Prussians" Bakunin meant not just Napoleon III and his crew, but the whole French bourgeoisie. The dénouement proposed by Bakunin has, obviously, nothing in common with the current position of the French social-patriots. Despite all his hatred of Bismarckian Germany, Bakunin didn't forget for a minute about the "internal Prussians." On the contrary, both by word and by deed, he advocated a popular uprising.

First and foremost, the overthrow of internal despotism, followed by a campaign by the liberated revolutionary populace against the invading external enemy – a campaign fought under the revolutionary banner – such was the point of view of Bakunin, and such is also now the point of view of revolutionary internationalists.

Golos truda, № 42 (July 2, 1915), p. 2.

Translated from the Russian and French by Malcolm Archibald.

¹⁵ Wolfgang Heine (1861–1944) and Albert Südekum (1871–1944) were German socialists who endorsed the German government's imperialist aims.

¹⁶ Léon Jouhaux (1879–1954) was an editor of *Bataille syndicaliste* and a leading figure in the CGT. Charles-Albert was the pseudonym of Charles Daudet (1869–1957), a French anarchist journalist and publisher who supported Kropotkin's pro-war stance.