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Marx and Engels and the International Working Men's Association

1872 to 1876

Max Nettlau

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“the other sections in England have all gone to sleep,” etc. It is tedious to follow these last particles of flickering life.

To what a degree all this quarrelling blinded even persons of undoubted activity and experience like J. Ph. Becker (his letter of May 30, 1867, is the 2,886th letter for propaganda purposes since 1861, he says), is shown by the following remark of his (November 25, 1873) to Sorge, the General Secretary of the International: “Enter without delay into relations with a. Terzaghi, editor of the Turin *Proletario*.... for I have reasons to believe that with this fellow.... something might be done for Italy.” At that time Terzaghi, a recognised police spy, had been long since exposed in Italy by Carlo Cafiero, had been refused admittance to the Geneva Anarchist Congress, and was even denounced in the Marxist pamphlet “L’Alliance,” published two months ago. Yet old J. Ph. Becker recommends him to the General Council.

These letters by Marx and Engels prove up to the hilt that wherever these men personally interfered with any movement, quarrelling and a public scandal were the inevitable result. This was the end of their participation in the German Communist societies of the forties and in their International and in other movements. The haughty contempt of Marx for all who did not follow him, as well as for those who became his tools—the brutality of Engels—made all fraternal co-operation with self-respecting men impossible. That in spite of this their theories met with wide acceptance is a fact the importance of which I do not deny, but the reasons of which I do not investigate here either. All I wish to say is that their correspondence placed side by side with that of Lassalle, Proudhon, Bakunin and others makes a deplorable effect. If this was generally recognised, we should not need to insist upon it, but as those who publish and commend it give out that it glorifies them and endorse all the insults they heap on their opponents and take little trouble to add any information to correct their libels, I thought it well to show how things went in those years within their own movement as described by their own words.

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my opinion of the European situation it is essentially useful to relegate to the back for the moment the formal organization of the International, and only to hold on, if possible, to the New York centre, to prevent idiots like Perret [the Secretary of the Geneva International] or adventurers like Cluseret to get hold of the direction and to compromise the cause. Events and the inevitable evolution and development of circumstances will by themselves provide a resuscitation of the International in an improved form.” And Engels (September 12, 1874) writes to Sorge: “By your leaving [the General Council] the old International is quite finished. And it is well so.... With the Hague Congress it was over indeed—and for both parties....” He puts forward an elaborate theoretical explanation for this decay, but we have seen in his letters too much of his intricate of intrigue and abuse for these *post factum* theoretical explanation to be considered of historical value.

The Marxist part of the International was indefinitely suspended at a meeting held in Philadelphia in July, 1876. Marxism had then arrived at its lowest depths since the fifties. Marx looked with discontent at the Amalgamation of the German Socialist Labour Party with the Lassalleans (Gotha, 1875), and his letter tearing to pieces the new party platform adopted at Gotha is now fuller explained by the mass of evidence we have of his hatred against Lassalle and his followers. In France the few who were the tools of Marx against Blanquists and Anarchists, were discredited in his own eyes. Mrs. Marx writes in January, 1897, to Sorge: “Of other acquaintances I can tell you but little, because we see few now, especially no Le Moussu’s [another member of the Hague majority, now completely discredited, see Engels’ letter of September 17, 1874], no Serrailier’s, above all no Blanquists. We had enough of them....” The indefatigable Mesa, living in Paris, sent a New York circular to Spain (Engels, August 13, 1875); the *Plebe* of Lodi joined pretty much the “Alliancists” (the same); the German Club in London, even, by the admission of Lassalleans, etc., appears less reliable;

Under the circumstances, no foreign delegates arriving, Becker took it upon himself to fabricate delegates, which he writes about at full length in the letter of November 4. Oberwinder, who took the name of Schwarz wrote out Austrian credentials, which were presented by people living in Geneva, and Becker and his friends passed these “twelve delegates mad on after the other” (“*12 nach und nach yemachte Delegirten*”) and “secured for us a strong majority.”

“After this we had to use the position with great circumspection and moderation in order to do away with all pretext of charging us with; dictatorship and majorisation, broad hints of which were soon thrown out. Therefore I myself spoke very little, and only when absolutely necessary.” So this curious Congress passed silently away; after many delays some of its minutes were sent to New York, which none there could make out. The General Council was to remain in New York and the next Congress to take place in 1875, which it never did.

Marx himself writes to Sorge (Sept. 27' 1873): “The fiasco of the Geneva Congress was inevitable. When it became known here that no American delegates would come the thing went immediately. You had been represented as my puppets. If you did not come and we had gone [to the Congress] this would have been declared a confirmation of the rumour anxiously spread by our opponents. Besides, it would have been said to prove that the American Federation existed only on paper. Moreover, the English Federation had not the money for a single delegate. The Portuguese, Spaniards, Italians, announced that under these conditions they could not send direct delegates; from Germany, Austria, Hungary news equally bad arrived. French participation was out of the question.... From Geneva we had no news: Outline is no longer there, old Becker kept an obstinate silence, and Mr. Perret wrote once or twice to mislead us.”

After explaining why none of his London friends went to the Geneva Congress, Marx gives the game up and says: “From

I.

F. A. Sorge, a German refugee of 1849, the chief American correspondent of Marx and Engels in the seventies and eighties, a few months before his death published a volume of letters addressed to him by Marx (1868–1881), Engels (1872–1895), J. Ph. Becker, Dietzgen and others (Stuttgart, 1906, xii., pp. 422, 8vo.) We have already had glimpses of Marx's personal life and doings in F. Lassalle's letters addressed to him during the fifties, in Marx's own letters to Dr. Kugelmann during the sixties, and in his letters to his daughter, Madame Longuet, towards the end of her and his life, etc. This volume, however, abounds with new materials, and although everything has not been published in full, an infinite number of statements and appreciations are here in print before us which unveil the threads of Marxism to an unprecedented extent. I propose to give some extracts relating to the inner history of the International, and let the writer's words speak for themselves, adding some connecting lines of historical notes. The subject is treated at considerable length in the second volume of J. Guillaume's *L'Internationale*, leading up to the Hague Congress of 1872, a volume which will shortly be published; the principal writings of Bakunin in 1870 are also being published just now by J. Guillaume in a carefully edited volume (Paris, 1907, *Oeuvres*, tome II.).

Marx was always eager to send information about Bakunin; in 1870 he wrote the famous *Confidential Communication*, published among the Kugelmann letters. To Sorge he writes on November 23, 1871:—

“His (Bakunin's) programme was riff-raff, superficially gathered from right and left—*equality of classes* (!), *abolition of the right of inheritance* as the starting point of the social movement (a St. Simonian idiom), Atheism dictated to the members as a

dogma, and the chief dogma (Proudhonist) *abstention from politics*.

This children's spelling-book met with sympathy (and still maintains it to extent) in Italy and Spain, where the real conditions of a workers' movement are still little developed, and among some vain, ambitious, hollow doctrinaires in French-speaking Switzerland and Belgium.

For Mr. Bakunin this doctrine (his rot begged from Proudhon, St. Simon, etc.) was and is a secondary object—only a means to impose his personality. If he is theoretically a blank, he is at home in intriguing.”

When after poisoning people's minds in this way for years and evading any encounter with his opponents at an open Congress, Marx was at last forced to convoke the Hague Congress (September, 18~2), he knew the small support he would find among the European International, and in order to dominate the Congress he ordered delegates' credentials from America. The letter showing how it was done is now before us (June 21, 1872):—

“*You and at least one or two others* must come. Those sections which send no *direct delegates* may send *credentials* (delegates' credentials).

The *Germans* for myself, Fr. Engels, Lochner, Karl Pfaender, Lessner.

The *French* for G. Rouvier, Auguste Serraillier, Le Moussu, Ed. Vaillant, F. Cournet, Ant. Arnoud.

The *Irish* for *MacDonell*, who does very well; or, if they prefer, for one of the forenamed Germans or French.”

the right side, I had, so to speak, raised from the dust thirteen delegates (*aus der Erde gestampft*), and things went after all far better than I expected. As to sober attitude and practical results the sixth Congress may even be an example to all the others—especially considering the difficulties caused by a certain disruption of the Roman [Swiss] Federation.”

The old humbug must have chuckled to himself when he wrote these lines. He was furious at heart at the London and New York Marxists who had deserted the Congress, and at the Geneva Internationalists, of whom more anon. When Sorge took the part of the former his wrath breaks loose, and he then revolts against the cowardice of the clever people in London, who, fearing a defeat, did not turn up. “*They ought to have come twice over if they saw danger ahead*,” he writes (November 2, 1873), and these are good words well worth remembering.

The Geneva Labour politicians for whom the International was but an electioneering cry, and against whom, in 1869, Bakunin and his friends fought bitterly but unsuccessfully, the friends of Outine, tools of the General Council in all the machinations against Bakunin—these people had, up to 1873, discredited the Geneva International to such an extent that it could no longer keep together, and, as a last remedy, schemes like an International Federation of Trade Unions were ventilated—ideas which, because coming from these people, unsuccessful politicians and schemers for office, no one seriously considered at that time. They would have liked to polish up their lost reputation by having the New York General Council transferred to Geneva—and it was just Becker, an intriguer but an old Socialist at the same time, who counteracted these schemes of Henri Perret, Duval and friends. Marx believed Cluseret to have been at their back (September 27)—an interesting bit of information if correct, but men who fancied Bakunin was at the hack of Scheu are not reliable witnesses.

for against all expectation neither Marx nor Engels nor any of their Loudon friends went there, nor any foreign delegates except Mr. Oberwinder, of Vienna; a Dutch delegate, who had been sent to the Anti-Authoritarian Congress held at the same time, also assisted.

This Oberwinder, a Frankfort journalist, had helped to introduce Lassallean Socialism in Austria; after some years, however, he leaned towards the Liberal Party and reduced the once vigorous Socialist movement to a mere suffrage question. At last the great mass of the Party, headed by Andreas Scheu, rose against this, and Oberwinder's followers were soon reduced to a small and vanishing clique. We should have thought that here, at last, Marx and Engels would have seen their way clear, but now, blinded by their fear and hatred of Bakunin, they did the wrong thing also here. Engels (May 3, 1873) writes: "To us Scheu is suspect: (1) he is in relations with Vaillant [the Blanquist], and (2) there are signs that he, like his friend and predecessor, Neumayer, who went mad, is in relations with Bakunin. The great phrases of the latter obtrude somewhat from Scheu's articles and speeches, and you will remember how his brother bolted at the Hague, when the affair with B. [Bakunin] was transacted." So many words, so many wrong statements! Heinrich Scheu and other delegates left the Hague because they had to attend a German Congress which immediately followed. Oberwinder, in his unscrupulous polemics, often denounced some Russian students whom Scheu knew in Vienna—and from this Engels puts him down as a Bakunist *and* a Blanquist at the same time, and does all he can to excuse the behaviour of Oberwinder, of whom he writes himself but a little later (July 26): "Oberwinder has always been a trimmer."

Anyhow, Becker reports on the "Congress" as follows (September 22): "Even before the bad news arrived about Ser-raillier and the English Federal Council [who did not come nor send delegates], in order to give the Congress greater renown by a larger number of delegates, and to secure the majority on

Twelve credentials for Marxists and Blanquists, who had but to travel from London to Holland—a red herring across the path of genuine delegates, who might have to travel from Spain, Italy or Switzerland. Thus Congresses are made.

The majority *thus* created expelled Bakunin and Guillaume after an inquiry by a committee to which but one member of the large anti-authoritarian minority of the Congress was admitted. One of the members of that committee, before which the friends of Bakunin were expected to lay their most private revolutionary affairs—they did not, of course—was an unknown person named Walter. His real name was Van Heddeghem, and of him Engels, on Alay 3, 1873, is forced to admit: "Heddeghem was a spy already at the Hague." Notwithstanding this, Engels is delighted to elaborate the scurrilous pamphlet *L'Alliance de Démocratie Socialiste* (1873), into which all the libels collected about Bakunin were gathered. It appears now that it contains materials—all the Russian parts referring to Bakunin and Netchaev—which the Hague committee never saw (Engels, September 21, October 5, 1872); these will make "a horrible scandal. I never met with such an infamous pack of rogues" (October 5). "The thing will explode like a bomb among the autonomists, and if anybody can be killed at all, Bakunin will be as dead as a doornail. Lafargue and I made it between us, only the conclusions are by Marx and myself" (July 25, 1873). It is known that Bakunin brushed this mud aside with two words, and that the thing fell entirely flat.

The Marxists had at the Hague Congress transferred the General Council of the International from London to New York. The way Engels handles this New York Council is quite farcical, and the life of that body was but the faint shadow of a shadow. The Spanish, Italian, Jurassian, Belgian, and part of the French and English Internationalists took no notice of it, the Dutch were indifferent, and its own friends, galvanized into life for the purposes of the Hague Congress, did almost exactly the same. Engels does his best first to gather the remains of power

into his own hands and those of his London friends, and then to write to Sorge, the secretary of that Council, fantastic reports of the phantom progress of the Marxist International and the usual amount of libels against the Anarchists.

In his report on *Spain* (October 31, 1872) he is forced to admit: "There exist in Spain only two local Federations which openly and thoroughly acknowledge the resolutions of the Hague Congress and the new General Council—the new Federation of Madrid and the Federation of Alcala de Henares," and "the great bulk of the Spanish International are still under the leadership of the Alliance, which predominates in the Federal Councils as well as in the most important Local Councils." He puts his faith in Jose Mesn, calling him "without doubt by far the most superior man we have in Spain, both as to character and talent, and indeed one of the best men we have anywhere." It is curious to note that men of a certain type like Jose Mesa, Mr. Glaser de Willebrord, and Mr. Maltman Barry, were always round Marx and Engels, and enjoyed their greatest confidence. Engels' letter to Mr. Glaser on the eve of the Hague Congress, published elsewhere, and Marx's letter to Sorge (September 27, 1877), saying "Barry is my factotum here," are documentary evidence of this.

Engels thinks it possible that at the next Spanish Congress "we shall blow up the whole thing and turn the Alliance out. We owe this to the energy of Mesa alone, who *single-handed* had to do everything" (November 16). The Cordova Congress was a splendid manifestation of the Anarchist International, and Engels, forestalling this defeat, records that Mesa wrote to him that many of our people are just now participating in the insurrection, in prison or with the bands in the mountains" (January 3, 1873). As the unique Mesa could not be ubiquitous, this information is rather puzzling, but Engels no doubt thought that it would do for Sorge! At Inst he begins to tell the truth (April 15, 1873): "The *Emancipation* of Madrid is dying, if not dead. We have sent them £15, but as

How little Marx and Engels knew these men! Engels, always brutal, dreams of "chucking out by blows" (*hinauspruegela*) (May 3, 1873), just as in 1870 when he wrote about the Congress proposed at Mayence. "In Switzerland," he says, "there is only *one* locality possible [for the General Congress] and that is *Geneva*. There the masses of the workers are behind us, and there exists *a hall belonging to the International*, the Temple Unique, from which we simply chuck out the gentlemen of the Alliance if they present themselves.... The Alliancists make every effort to come to the Congress in great numbers, whilst our people all go to sleep." After the French arrests no French delegates can come, and the German delegates were greatly disappointed by all the bickerings and quarrellings they saw at the Hague Congress; moreover their actual leaders, during the imprisonment of Bebel and Liebknecht, were old Lassalleans, York and others, who—as Engels implies—did not dance to the tune of the London Marxists, the bitterest enemies of Lassalle. "the Geneva people themselves are doing nothing, the *Egalité* [their organ] seems dead [it had been so a long time already], thus no great local support may be expected—only we *sit in our own house* and among people who know Bakunin and his band, and will turn them out by blows if necessary. Thus Geneva is the *only* place to guarantee a victory for us;" but it is further *absolutely* necessary that the General Council declares that the Belgians, Spaniards, part of the English and Jurassians have *left* the Society, and that the Italian Federation never belonged to it! Under these precautions then Engels hoped that a successful Congress should be held in their last mousehole in Europe, the hall of the Geneva International ! But this is nothing in comparison to what really took place.

Johann Philipp Becker, an old and very active Socialist, who affected patriarchal airs, but with all this was an unscrupulous schemer had at the last moment to fabricate this General Congress of Geneva (September, 1873) almost out of nothing—

was to any extent, and the Hague majority of members of the General Council, Blanquists and politicians was the momentary creation of intrigue and humbug.

This will further be seen by the way the Geneva Congress of 1873 was fabricated by J. O. L. Becker—not to be confounded with the Geneva Congress of the Anarchist Federations of the same month.

II.

The minority of the Hague Congress protested against the resolutions voted by the fictitious Marxist and Blanquist majority (political action made compulsory, the expulsion of Bakunin and Guillaume, etc.); they met with Bakunin at Zurich, later at St. Imier (Swiss Jura), where an International Conference was held (September, 1872). This action was confirmed by atioilal Congresses held in the Jura, in Spain, Belgium, and, in March, 1873, in Italy. They prepared an Internatimal Congress which took place in September, 1873, in Geneva, of which an extensive report has been published (Locle, 1874).. The New York General Council voted their suspension,” but as they never recognised this Council at all no notice was taken of its doings in their regard.

Marx was furious at these mild proceedings, “suspension” only, which would have permitted them to appeal to the next General Congress. He tells Sorge (February 12, 1873) that by their action they put themselves outside of the Society, and, being no longer members, could not in any way interfere with any future Congress. “The great result of the Hague Congress was to compel the foul elements *to expel themselves*, that is to leave.” This is just what they did not do; they continued in the Society and disregarded the ridiculous New York dictatorship and its European agents.

scarcely anybody paid for the copies received [which nobody evidently wanted !] it appears impossible to keep it up.” But Mesa is irrepressible; he corresponds with Engels “with regard to another paper to be started” (of which nothing ever came).

With regard to *Italy*, Engels writes (November 2, 1872):—“Bignami [in Lodi, Lombardia] is the only fellow in Italy who took our part, though up to the present not very energetically... He sits amidst the autonomists, and has still to take certain precautions.” Bignami published a manifesto of the New York General Council, and that number of his paper, *La Plebe*, was seized, and Bignami and two others were arrested (December 14), six others ran away, and, says Engels (January 4, 1873), “Bignami bombards me with letters for support.” Engels appeals for money to America: “It is of the *highest importance* that Lodi be supported from abroad; it is our strongest position in Italy, and now, when nothing more is heard from Turin, the only reliable.... If Lodi and the *Plebe* are lost to us, we have no further foothold in Italy, on that you may rely.” On March 20: “The section of Lodi has not yet been reconstituted, and that of Turin probably went to pieces.” Meanwhile three of the arrested were released after a fortnight, and Bignami after six weeks. They had received from London, Germany and Austria £10, and from New York £8 more was sent, which Engels sent to Bignami, who stated that “he was hiding again in order to avoid being dragged to prison to undergo a sentence of imprisonment, which he prefers doing later or after having been restored to better health” (April 15, 1873); the *Plebe* appears to be suspended too.” Thus the Spanish Marxist International was last seen with the bands in the mountains, the Italian Marxist International was hiding, and in that same letter Engels has the cheek to write: “The arrest of Alliancists at Bologna and Mirandole will not last long, they will soon be liberated; if some of them are now and again arrested by mistake, they never suffer seriously.” This is Engel’s description of the endless persecutions to which the real International in Italy was exposed, a

record of which—a reprint of letters sent to the Jurassian *Bulletin*, with connecting text—is now published in the Geneva *Risveglio* by J. Guillaume and L. Bertoni.

But there is something more mysterious still than these vanishing Spanish and Italian sections. It is the *Polish* International, whose delegate, Wroblewski, voted also for the expulsion of Bakunin at the Hague Congress, though he must have known that Bakunin had risked his liberty more than once and was ready to risk his life for Poland. Marx writes to Sorge (December 21, 1872) that the General Council obtained the participation of Poland in the International under the condition “that he deals *only* with Wroblewski, who communicates what he thinks right or necessary.”

“In this ease you have no choice. You must give Wroblewski the same unconditional powers as we did, or give up Poland.”

And Engels (March 20, 1873): “Wroblewski *cannot* send any report, since in Poland everything is secret, and we never asked him about details,”—to which Sorge adds (1906): “Details have never been asked, but a sign of life.”

This *sign of life*, a very modest demand, never came—nor was anything ever heard again from *Denmark*, whose delegate, Pihl, also voted with the majority (“Still not one line,” January 4, 1873; “Not a word,” March 30; “Nothing heard nor seen,” May 3; “Never heard a word from Pihl,” July 26).

The French Blanquists, who had entered the General Council after the Paris Commune, left after the Hague Congress in full discontent. With all the French refugees in London, Engels wrote on December 7, 1872: “We have none other here [who might receive general powers for France] but Serlaillier.” Two French agents of the Blanquists and the General Council, Van Heddeghem and D’Entraygues (another member of the Hague majority, called Swarm there) were arrested in France—the former turning out to have been a spy; the latter, “with the usual pedantry, had a mass of useless lists” (of names of Internationalists, March 20, 1873), and “denounced from personal reasons

and feebleness some who had given him a hiding before “ (May 3), These arrests in Paris and in the South-West of France put an end to the Marxist International in France entrusted to Walter and Swarm!

About the sections in *Germany* and *Austria* neither Engels nor Sorge knew any details (March 20, 1873); Engels had no addresses in *Holland* and *Belgium* (ib.) The *Portuguese* paper “will have to suspend its publication for a short time, but will reappear” (April 15); the (London) *International Herald* “also is on its last legs” (ib.) When we speak of the pseudo-congress of Geneva (September, 1873) we shall see with what utter contempt Marx and Becher wrote of their allies against Bakunin, the politicians of the Geneva *Fédération Romande*. The *English* International had also split, and no epithets are too strong to be used by Marx against Hales, Eccarias, Jung, etc. The *American* International, which for years had been divided, continued to quarrel. Thus wherever we look we see the most complete breakdown of the structure on which Marx had relied to get a majority at the Hague to expel Bakunin, and later on the Anarchist federations.

To the New York General Council the minute books of the London Council were never sent, and Engels begs of Sorge nearly all the powers he can think of as agents for European countries (November 16, 1872): England and Italy for himself, France for Serrailier, Germany for Marx. They did not seem able to get even the papers published in Europe (February 8, 1873).

All this points to but one conclusion: if the Marxist International after the Hague Congress is proved now by the word of their chiefs themselves to be an almost non-existing thing, did it have any real life at any time whatsoever before that Congress? I believe not. Wherever the International existed, it was revolutionary (as in Spain, Italy, etc.) political (a Radical electioneering body as in Geneva), trade unionist, or consisted of small branches for Socialist propaganda. Marxist it never