

This is a synthesis of a recently published book on

REVOLUTION AND COUNTER-REVOLUTION IN PARIS 1870-1871

Hundreds of books have been written on the Paris Commune. What is so pertinent about this new book on an event which has used up so much ink?

Very different, even opposite, conclusions may be drawn from the same event. Point of view is fundamental. A point of view is necessarily a class point of view. That is what determines the focus of an analysis.

This book has gone over the events from a resolutely proletarian point of view. That 'biases' may be clearly established. The book seeks to distinguish precisely where the class boundaries in the movement of class confrontation were to be found. It seeks to grasp and distinguish what made the proletariat strong and what sent it to its ruin, how it affirmed itself as an autonomous class and how it got caught up in bourgeois alternatives. That's how the book stands out from many other texts on the Paris Commune.

One of the book's essential traits is that it distinguishes between the proletarian mobilization which reached its peak in the March 18th insurrection and the Commune government which did all it could to contain the insurrectionist movement and in the end gave it over to Thiers and his cronies to massacre. Generally speaking, books about the Paris Commune praise *La Commune*, without any such distinction. They only see counter-revolution in the form of the bourgeois forces grouped behind Thiers and his general staff. They deplore the massacre during the *bloody week* without seeing that this massacre would not have been possible without the assistance of the republican fraction inside Paris itself. They see the confrontation between Paris and Versailles. But class boundaries went through Paris itself, between the armed proletariat and the Commune government.

That is why, at the book's very start, it is made clear that the word *Commune* covers two different and opposed contents : The Commune as a revolutionary uprising and the Commune as the government of Paris. In order to make ourselves understood terminologically we use the *Commune* when we refer to revolutionary movement and we use *Commune government* when we refer to the State's reorganization in the republican form in Paris.

The proletariat was storming heaven in 1870-71 in France. The March 18th 1871 insurrection was the epicenter of a shock wave which would spread well beyond the borders of France and end up becoming an undeniable reference. Despite the ferocious repression against it the Paris Commune left words, written in blood : revolution is possible, a society without classes, State, private property, money, labor can be a reality.

Many attempts have been made to deform the history of struggle or to make empty praise for what is made into a smooth, hollow object. Our aim is to follow the class confrontations which took place then in order to emphasize their strengths and especially to grasp their limits. That is the objective of this text.

Until September 4th 1870

Strikes multiplied and became more radical from 1868 on. Generally the bourgeoisie responded to these struggles with troops and massacres like in Ricamarie (15 dead in June 1869) or at Aubin (17 dead in October). But we must note that in certain industrial centers the bourgeoisie was compelled to cut some slack to those struggling by raising wages and decreasing labor time. The proletariat gained strength and unity and showed this in that avant-garde groups became stronger. In 1864 the International Working Men's Association was founded in London. In the spring of 1870 four big IWA federations were being established in France. In 1865 the Blanquist organization which would later play an important role in struggles was constituted. Other poles of proletarian grouping sprang up in the form of local federations of union hall workers or cooperative restaurants. These

were real hotbeds of subversion in which discussion on the revolution was making good progress. Public meetings were authorized in Paris as of June 1868. They would become revolutionary melting pots. For two years more than a thousand meetings allowed for debate, the circulation of information, solidarity actions, as well as the preparation of riots and attempts at insurrection. The coming proletarian storm which would fall upon the bourgeoisie in the following months was announced by strikes, associations, riots, and barricades.

In Germany a movement was on its way since 1868, developing workers' associations and strikes. The Reichstag, relying on social-democracy to contain this movement, voted for the right to strike and to organize in May 1869. Despite this attempt to contain and control the movement, as well as a series of arrests and acts of intimidation, tough strikes broke out. The declaration of war on July 19th 1870 (by the French State to Germany) is bourgeois society's answer to its concern for social peace, its need to get the exploited back to their places, and to put an end to the rise of proletariat's power.

The State, as much in Germany as in France, finds its interest in war. National union, the dream of bourgeois harmony, can become reality: opposing the active proletariat with the French people and the German people, united around the bourgeois values of labor, family, and nation.

The proletariat could not prevent the military deployment, its enrollment and its departure for the battlefield. But the holy union celebrating an interclass reunion and burying proletariat's struggles didn't work out either in that the strikes which were going on before the war did not stop after July 19th 1870.

In Paris IWA militants sent out a Call to workers of all the world and organized demonstrations. In Germany and Austria IWA militants were sent to prison for participating in daily demonstrations against the war. This internationalist attitude, despite certain pacifist shortcomings, was kept up throughout the conflict. Just three weeks into the war the proletariat violently demonstrated its refusal of holy union in wrecking havoc at the Paris stock exchange, in demonstrating massively, in confronting the police. The State reacted by proclaiming a state of siege in Paris as well as in several regions of France. On August 9th thousands of proletarians invaded the streets and encircled the Palais-Bourbon which held the National Assembly. On the 10th numerous contingents of troops and gendarmes were sent to protect the legislative body and the police made many arrests. On the 14th pressure was so high that the Blanquists thought it was possible to lead the suburb dwellers in a riot at La Villette. But nobody followed them. Their leaders, isolated, were arrested and heavily charged. Those who escaped became clandestine and waited for a more favorable hour.

These actions were mixed with patriotic resentment after the first defeats on the battlefield were announced. Nonetheless the bourgeoisie started to feel afraid. 40,000 soldiers were present to maintain order. A wave of repression and a campaign of terror was unleashed. The bourgeoisie armed 60 battalions of the National Guard on August 12th. Its perspective for the moment was "*arm the bourgeois, not proletarians, particularly former soldiers in order to have a force capable of opposing revolts by the proletariat which is emboldened by the distance at which the other troops now are[...]*". In the first stage these battalions were composed of "reliable" elements coming from bourgeois neighborhoods. A month later on September 6th the bourgeoisie was compelled to arm 60 new "moderate" battalions, though they received only old rifles whereas the the regiments recruited in the bourgeois neighborhoods received bolt-action rifles. A few weeks later 254 battalions of the National Guard would be created, the majority of which were present in workingclass neighborhoods. All in all that made 300,000 National Guards (out of two million inhabitants): the organization and the arming of the National Guard had become a danger for the bourgeoisie in that there were armed proletarians stationed in their own neighborhoods. In addition, it was the National Guards themselves who elected their leaders. These proletarians, underneath their uniforms, swiftly came to elect those whose anti-government practice was more in tune with the

rising discontent.

The bourgeoisie was quite clear about the threat posed to its existence. But the proletariat was only very partially conscious of its revolutionary potential. Patriotic hysteria obscured the perspective of an uncompromising struggle against all bourgeois fractions even though the proletariat's actions and practice contained a threat for the stability of the State. Not helping matters the IWA placed itself on bourgeois grounds through the voice of its General Council, who happened to be Marx. His July 23rd 1870 Address justified a defensive war on the part of the bourgeoisie in Germany. This speech got mired up in pointless considerations concerning the “dynastic” nature of the war opposing “bonapartist” France and the Germany of “junkers”¹. The Address placed things on the grounds of the attacking nation and the attacked nation which in the end means having to choose between the two bourgeois sides, two States or bourgeois fractions, imperial and republican.

On September 2nd 1870 a large part of the French army (including Bonaparte) was taken prisoner in Sedan. This military defeat, synonymous to thousands of dead and wounded, was what pushed the proletariat to action. As soon as the defeat was announced on September 3rd 1870 the proletariat rose up to the cry of “*Downfall! Long live the republic!*” and “*workers came down in numerous columns from Belleville, Menilmontant, and Monmartre*”. The Blanquists managed to give a direction to this workers' outburst. This was done more easily in that even before these events they had been intensifying their revolutionary propaganda in order to prepare a demonstration the next day. Contrary to the failure of August 14th 1870 this time they acted more in harmony with the general discontent which could be found among many layers of the proletariat. Their force was to designate a precise object : the legislative body, meeting place for the parliamentary riffraff. They entered the building and kicked out the ministers. Then they formed two groups, one which would force open the doors to the Ste. Pélagie and the Cherche-Midi prisons so as to release comrades and the other which would head to the Palais-Bourbon so as to overthrow the empire and proclaim the Republic.

In September-October 1870 the Republic's problem was the following: rebuilding an army capable of firing on the “reds”, on the “riffraff”. Bazaine, the head of the French army, secretly negotiated with Bismark the surrender of the Rhine army which was surrounded in Metz. This was done so that these troops could “*carry out the order consisting in turning around and protecting the social order instead of defending the territory*”. The left fraction of the Republic, boosted by Gambetta, organized an “all out war” out of worry about the revolution. This had some reaction from many proletarians, prisoners of patriotic ideology. Thus the bourgeoisie managed to impose an apparent fracture in society: on the one hand the fraction which wanted a Prussian victory so as to crush the “reds”, and on the other hand the “real patriots” who wanted an “all out war” so as to impose a republican regime.

Between patriotism and class war

Starting on September 4th 1870 nationalist insanity took hold of the proletariat. Revolutionary groups broke with two fundamental keys: class independence and internationalism. They found themselves on the same non-classist grounds as the bourgeois forces which sought to contain struggle and which referred to “the Germans” as the enemy. Blanquist militants, as well as those of the IWA, supported the National Defense government. While the Blanquists were giving military advice in their newspaper *La Patrie en Danger* (The Nation in Danger) the French federations of the IWA were asking Gambetta to organize the defense

The IWA and union hall militants actively participated in the creation of twenty republican committees of vigilance and defense so that “*these committees put themselves at the disposal of the provisional government so as to carry out its orders, and provide it with their most loyal service to*

1 “Junker” is the term used for officers in training who as young as sixteen were brainwashed by the State into becoming its loyal servants.

defend the capitol". Such a nationalist practice could only lead to the negation of the struggle against the State regardless of the protagonists' good intentions such as wanting to air workers' demands. All of these militants contributed in breaking the insurrectionary impulse of September 3rd. They were incapable of understanding its revolutionary force, its intrinsic opposition to the bourgeoisie and its war. This class reaction was superseded by nationalist poison which led the proletariat to struggle side by side with bourgeoisie.

At the same time class expression was affirming itself little by little inside of the Vigilance committees, in contradiction with their patriotism, thus distancing themselves from the Republican central committee. The day after September 4th proletarians came out of their neighborhoods several times to demand, in vain, that the government do a better job of defending the nation. On September 15th and on October 8th the Vigilance committees criticized the Republican central committee through posters for its indecision concerning National Defense. It was on October 8th at a demonstration organized by the Republican Central Committee that the "Commune" was first openly proclaimed. The Vigilance committees became more radical. A whole series of organizations, including the Clubs, tended to back away from supporting, even critically, the provisional government. These Clubs came directly out of the public meetings: food speculators, pawnshops, and the National Defense government's "immobility" were criticized. In October, National Guard battalions from red neighborhoods came out to the town hall on a regular basis to demand a sally against the German army, as well as bolt-action rifles, municipal elections, food requisitions, and food rationing. Each time the government showed the delegates to the door with haughtiness and disdain. In these conditions it's not surprising that the idea of a show of power ripened.

The French army surrendered in Metz on October 27th. Word of the surrender spread. The news didn't reach Paris until the 31st. The show of power was becoming concrete. A crowd of proletarians composed of the National Guard regiments which had been won over to the revolution as well as rogue soldiers with Blanquist militants at their head attacked the town hall. The government was taken prisoner. But the very militants who had done their best to organize the rise of the movement's power showed themselves to be terribly inconsistent. Once they had become masters of the place they started beating about the bush and releasing ministers while making them promise to resign and to leave their places so as to allow for a freely elected Commune. They did not at all realize that during this time counter-revolution was getting reorganized and had started surrounding them: the Brittany militia (elite troops) took position, aimed their guns at them, and then took them off to prison.

The tug of war between the National Defense government and the "reds" would become more and more intense as of October 31st. Through its most radical representatives the bourgeoisie intensified its propaganda for a "better national defense". Yet for a growing number of proletarians the new bourgeois fraction born on September 4th had shown its true face. It was no longer credible. Class antagonism appeared more clearly and a process of becoming autonomous affirmed itself little by little. The watchword "Vive la Commune" could be heard louder and louder.

From October 31st 1870 to January 22nd 1871

From October 31st until the month of December the movement underwent repression and went into withdrawal. Paris was almost completely encircled by the German army. Just as in all bourgeois wars the proletariat was weakened by rationing, requisitions, and waiting in line for bread. The National Defense government quite knowingly sent proletarians to their deaths by deliberately organizing disastrous sallies. Certain militants blamed the scarcity on "negligent" leaders and saw the military defeats as "treason". Few realized that this was part of a deliberate practice. The

Republic's objective was clear: confine revolutionary militants to Paris where they could be kept under surveillance, use of a policy of famine, the massacre of the most combative workers through war.

Those who returned from the front were completely exasperated. Their cry was "Long live peace!", which in this context meant "Down with war!". An intense revolutionary agitation stirred the National Guard. The National Guard had started falling apart just as battalions of rogue soldiers were being created in which the social question was more important than the national question. The demand for the removal from office of the National Defense government was on everybody's lips in the Clubs as well as the denunciation of grabbers and the demand for free rent. This was being discussed in a climate in which meeting secretly was more and more becoming the tendency. An intense activity was being developed within the Vigilance Committees : organized discussions, recriminations against the government of misery, and parallel organization more and more turned to struggle. The IWA militants had deserted these committees at the end of November. It was within these committees, under the guise of the Defense League, an armed semi-secret organization, that the Blanquists would act. From then on it was time to organize a plot to impose the Commune.

On January 6th 1871 a poster appeared all over Paris signed by the Vigilance Committees. It called for "Judas's gang" to leave office. The watchwords were "*Make way for the People! Make way for the Commune!*". But this poster was but the remains of an attempted action of a grand scale! It was intended that the poster simply announce that the Communal Delegation of the twenty districts had seized power. The most energetic members' objective was to "*install the revolutionary commune by revolutionary means*". The action was called off at the last minute despite the will of these militants, of whom the Blanquists were a part, to carry out this insurrection. But the poster was still put up! The repression which followed came down hard and forced the most radical militants into hiding.

On January 21st a commando of Belleville Rogue Soldiers, which had gotten together again despite the order to break up, freed the Blanquist leaders from Mazas prison.

On January 22nd a new attempt was made to take over the town hall. As the crowd shouted "down with Trochu", "death to traitors" battalions of insurgents took up position. But the Brittany militia was gathered together inside. Just as the mayor pretended to receive the delegates the militia opened fire, leaving thirty dead.

There were two lessons to be learned from this new bloody defeat: The organization of actions had to be secret. It was time for more radical insurrectionary preparation, without illusions concerning either parliament or any other republican bourgeois fraction. This time the interior enemy *was consciously understood to be an enemy*. The Blanquist militants' practice had evolved since the experience at La Villette on August 14th 1870. They decided wholeheartedly on a violent confrontation with the State, and so they prepared and organized. Their influence in the suburbs, the clubs and the committees was growing. Most of the IWA militants were unable to see this evolution. They kept up with their conciliatory propaganda which was well below the level of what was fermenting inside the proletariat.

From January 22nd to March 18th 1871

The armistice was signed on January 28th 1871. Regardless of this the proletariat did not give up its arms. The regular army was falling apart. One of the first principles of every army was no longer being respected: separate soldiers, in barracks, from the rest of the population. They were bivouacking in the streets and in parks. Some of them occupied wooden shacks in the city squares.

Others were billeted with the locals. The Paris army's commander and chief, Vinoy, wanted the troops to leave Paris as soon as possible. In March he ordered three columns of troops towards Orelans. But many soldiers missed the departure. Apparently more reliable troops arrived from the country. But nothing had been organized to accommodate them. In addition to this was the problem of food rationing. As of March the rations had diminished. Many men fell sick (the figure of 40,000 sick and wounded is mentioned). The climate necessary to maintain military discipline had completely disappeared. The new officers were unable to put an end to the apathy and discouragement which were paralyzing the army more and more.

Many proletarians enrolled in the National Guard refused military discipline and rejected the State's objectives. More and more they defined their class needs against the bourgeoisie and its program to restore capitalist order. The government tried to get rid of these proletarians and suppressed their pay on February 15th 1871. This move brought these proletarians to organize their own clear and distinct direction: The National Guard Federation². The National Guard battalions which refused the armistice and radically opposed the government needed to regroup and centralize. The National Guard Federation answered that need. At first it expressed a process of rupture. But at the end of February the constitution of the Central Committee of the National Guard put an end to this process. Class struggle was taking place in the very midst of the National Guard, the fracture between proletarian ruptures and bourgeois reformist aims. The Central Committee, faced with the danger of a clear cut line between the classes, did its best to present itself as the emanation of the whole of the National Guard.

Revolutionaries saw the Central Committee of the National Guard as an answer to the proletariat's need for a centralizing organ for the struggle. This was a real need in the movement. The terrible mistake was to believe the Central Committee could carry out this role. As a result many militants who had so far been on the side of the revolution ended up rubbing elbows with republican reformists. These same militants, calling themselves “republicans”, defined a common ground in which the revolutionary movement ended up negotiating a number of decisions with the leftist bourgeoisie. These decisions would later prove fatal. The Central Committee for the National Guard constituted a new bourgeois fraction. All of this expressed this class contradiction: the proletariat needed to centralize its force in a red guard and the bourgeoisie needed to disorganize this same force by structuring it into a bourgeois army painted red.

Towards the end of January the bourgeoisie hit back in two different ways: On the one hand Vinoy ordered the Clubs to close and forbid seventeen different newspapers. On the other hand after having used famine in order to weaken the strength of struggling proletarians it used the return of food (Paris had always been full of food) in order to impose an armistice to the proletarians as an appropriate solution. National elections were organized on February 8th 1871. The vast majority of revolutionary militants lost themselves in parliamentarism. In doing so they gave credit to the criminal illusion that the electoral trampoline made up a viable means to fight the bourgeoisie. Apart from a few rare exceptions the Paris federation of the IWA wallowed in the mud of this appalling campaign to such a degree that they presented themselves on the same list as openly bourgeois candidates. This was all the more criminal in that during the month of February the proletariat was becoming more radical.

February 24th 1871: Many members of the National Guard battalions, the Seine district riot police, and the regular army rallied at at the Place de la Bastille in order to commemorate the February 1848 revolution. They mingled and fraternized.

2 It's from that point on that the term “federates” would be used to designate the proletarians, beneath their uniforms, of the National Guard.

February 25th 1871: The gathering at Place de la Bastille had grown bigger and bigger. The armed guard sent to put down the gathering ended up joining it.

February 26th 1871: A policeman was promptly thrown into the river Seine and drowned for having had the impudence to write down the regiment numbers of the National Guard rebels still at the Place de la Bastille. National Guards seized 38 canons and 300 rifles. These were later taken to be stockpiled in neighborhoods in which the police no longer dared to venture. That evening four army battalions which were to occupy to Place de la Bastille fraternized with those still rallied there. Thousands of National Guards marched through the night, invading bourgeois neighborhoods.

February 27th 1871: St. Pélagie prison was attacked in order to free comrades. National Guards seized three million bullets.

February 28th 1871: National Guards took large quantities of guns and ammunition from arsenals to red neighborhoods. Four regiments left Belleville. Officers could no longer go out in the street for fear for their own safety. 50,000 National Guards gathered together. They decided that they would fight any attempt of the German army to enter Paris. The Provisional Commission of the National Guard Federation, aided by the Committee of the twenty districts and in collaboration with Vinoy, did all it could to oppose an eventual confrontation. The Central committee committed the National Guard to “*give its aid in the carrying out of any necessary measures to attain this goal and to avoid any aggression which would lead to the immediate overthrow of the Republic.*”

March 2nd 1871: Canons and 2,000 rifles were seized. Demonstrations continued at the Place de la Bastille.

March 3rd 1871: Gunpowder disappeared at a bastion in the ramparts. Guns and ammunition disappeared from a police station. Vinoy refused to intervene as he was “*conscious of the weakness of his troops*”.

March 4th 1871: Twenty-nine howitzers, canons, and ammunition “disappeared” from La Chapelle. A detachment of the Republican Guard had to evacuate its premises. The 4th sector of Vinoy's army reported that 1,592,637 bullets had been pilfered.

March 8th 1871: As the Central Committee of the National Guard was looked upon as too moderate an insurrectionary sector was organized independently.

March 9th 1871: Mutinies broke out among battalions of riot police. They arrested their officers and took them to the Central Committee. The Central Committee then released them.

March 10th 1871: Two laws were voted. One demanded the payment of bills of exchange and the other the payment of rent. A moratorium on rent had been pronounced during the siege. These decrees were taken as a provocation. Thousands of proletarians got kicked out of their homes and found themselves in the street, unable to pay their rent. Thousands of shopkeepers went bankrupt and found themselves ruined with no perspective. All of these discontent joined the current of revolt which was on the rise.

The strategy of the bourgeois fraction led by Thiers

At that particular time the bourgeois fraction regrouped around Thiers had a clearer vision of the outcome of the class confrontation than the proletariat itself. In August 1870 this fraction hid behind monarchist deputies when it was time to squash revolts through war. In September 1870 it was able to slow down the the proletariat's destructive push forwards by deviating it into a simple political change in government. In the autumn and winter of 1870-71 it sent the uncontrollables to be massacred, playing the nationalist card all the way. The National Defense government showed itself capable of adapting to the situation's evolution notably by avoiding the use of direct repression as the Empire's disciples would have done. At that particular moment the government didn't know what regiments it could count on and there was a good chance that any such direct repression could have dramatic results.

Thiers was conscious of the inevitable confrontation with the armed proletariat. But he wanted to decide on the where and when of this confrontation: early March. He prepared his retreat to Versailles. He had the regiments which were the least contaminated by defeatism evacuate Paris. In the country he disarmed the regiments which he couldn't count on. He imprisoned the agitators among the soldiers. He had the monarchist regiments move far away from Paris. The monarchist fraction screamed their disagreement with this initiative but quickly stood behind the Thiers fraction as it was the only one capable of doing away with the "reds". This fraction had political clarity and a great capacity to prepare for what was coming next. These qualities gave them the trust of its pairs as well as later victory. Thiers knew that this class against class confrontation was going to be more intense than the previous ones. He had to disarm the red neighborhoods as a measure of prevention. On March 17th he had Blanqui arrested.

Official historiography sticks to the simplistic version according to which the March 18th insurrection took place in reaction to a "provocation" by the Versailles when it tried to take the canons guarded by the National Guard. In reality the left republican fraction which was regrouped around the Central Committee would have also been quite relieved to not have to deal with an insurrection. There were negotiations during which the Central Committee proposed to give the canons back to Versailles "*on the condition that we're able to find a way of not hurting the National Guards' pride*". Even the Montmartre 61st battalion – one of the most combative – publicly proposed to give the canons back to the government. But that was all without taking into account the proletariat's reaction. March 13th angry proletarians opposed and prevented the removal of the canons. March 16th the same thing happened at Place des Vosges. March 17th demonstrations went on throughout the red neighborhoods and barricades were set up. All of this on the eve of March 18th!

March 18th 1871

During the night of the 17th to the 18th the government installed troops at strategic points such as Montmartre, the Buttes-Chaumont, and Place Puebla and stocked canons at the Place des Vosges. Choppin, the assistant police prefect, spent the night writing a list of the members of the Central Committee of the National Guard as well as a list of the most well-known militants. The cops were behind every army column ready to make arrests. By morning word of this project had gotten around and the reaction was immediate. The proletariat rose up and drove back this offensive. Women were the first to react. They scolded the soldiers in position, called out to them, mingled with them, offered them something to eat and drink...It was a mutiny. Generals Thomas and Lecompte were arrested and promptly shot without a judicial quibble. Soon in the workers' neighborhoods barricades were built and an offensive movement was launched so as to retake control of the various strategic points.

The proletarian reaction took place outside of the Central Committee. Revolutionaries led their own battalions on their own initiative and positioned themselves in front of Thiers' soldiers. Combat was very rare as the movement of fraternization between proletarians, despite their different uniforms, was strong. The bourgeoisie needed to determine which forces it could still count on. The Montmartre canon affair allowed them to tell which regiments were still unaffected from those which were decidedly won over to the revolution. The government was surprised by the workers' neighborhood battalions' capacity to mobilize on their own initiative, independently of the Central Committee of the National Guard's orders. They were also surprised by the intensity of defeatism which prevailed in the army.

March 18th didn't come out of nowhere like a flash of lightning in an otherwise blue sky. Its strength came from the continuity given by revolutionary militants in their organizational activity in

Vigilance Committees, National Guard red battalions, Rogue Soliders and other proletarian organizations. It came from the activity of the Blanquist militants and/or IWA members or else from the “partyless” or else from members or non-members of the Central Committee of the National Guard. They were able to bring multiple militant energies together and thus help turn them into a revolutionary direction. This success can be explained by all of the conspiratorial activity by certain Blanquist militants who were organized as a revolutionary army. That day Duval and the 13th district and 5th district troops came from the southern neighborhoods. They fired blanks out of a canon as a call to riot. They put about fifteen canons around the town hall. They dug trenches. They put up a barricade. They arrested policemen. They blocked the district police stations. During the afternoon they took the offensive and went on to take over the Orleans train station, the Jardin des Plantes, and police headquarters which they took at 8pm. A large part of the left bank of the Seine was then in their hands and at 3 pm it's the city hall which became the new target. Parallel to this, Eudes was coming down from the north with the proletarians of Belleville. Varlin went to Batignolles to round up IWA members. Quite the contrary of the Central Committee these militants had been consciously preparing the confrontation and had been giving themselves the means to resist since February. They had appropriated canons and pillaged ammunition depots. This structured, efficient class force was inevitably going to clash with the Central Committee.

March 19th to 26th

The practical problem of the extension or else the death of the revolution was then posed. How could this rapidly won victory be developed? Some were lucid enough to formulate the necessity of pursuing and hunting down the government and the long columns of police and soldiers which had been put to flight. Thousands of proletarians were ready to take to the path of Versailles and have it out with this army which was falling apart. This mobilization was so important that it wasn't far from completely destabilizing the bourgeoisie, preventing its reorganization in Versailles, and changing the balance of powers. Alas, it was the movement's weakness which caused these thousands of proletarians to leave it all up to the Central Committee of the National Guard. They went to the city hall where they signed up as volunteers and waited for the Central Committee of the National Guard to organize the leadership of the counter-attack.

But the Central Committee of the National Guard had no such intentions. It tried its hardest to find a political solution and made it into a point of honor to give the full responsibility for the events which would follow to a government which had been elected through universal suffrage. Revolutionary militants would find themselves in an awkward position and incapable of giving another direction. By taking part in the Central Committee they gave it just the level of credibility necessary to get the movement's reins back in hand. They would then tire themselves out trying to change its decisions. It was a waste of time.

The only acts which broke at all with this failing were done by militants such as Jean Allemane. As early as March 19th he went to Versailles with comrades and prepared an attack plan which he later submitted to Billioray on March 22nd. Billioray was a member of the IWA, of the Central Committee and of the future Commune government. This step was in response to the necessities and the possibilities of the development of the struggle at that particular moment. On the side of the Versailles the scattered troops were far from having been won over to the counter-revolution. Many soldiers continued to reach Paris. The others only obeyed out of fear of the police. The general feeling among the soldiers was one of sympathy for what was going on in Paris. But Billioray looked down on this project. This opposition to the action revealed a class chasm between the practice consisting of taking risks so as to answer the needs of the struggle and the practice of preparing a democratico-murderous circus. Another grave error was to have not immediately

occupied Mont-Valérien. It was a military stronghold situated in the west of Paris. It was strategically important because by its altitude it dominated the whole city. The Versailles troops took it over in the night of March 19th to 20th. This act had its consequences.

During this time the Central Committee was entirely invested by the bourgeois preoccupation of managing the Republic's goods, giving out government posts, organizing elections,...and reassuring the German army which was worried about a revolution *“In that the revolution which has been accomplished in Paris by the Central Committee is of an essentially municipal character and so is in no way an aggression towards the German army.”*

Proletarian militants would take compromise very far – discussions with the mayors who had stayed in Paris about the dates and other details of the ballot, discussions with Versailles about the legitimacy of elections. This was just idle chatter during a crucial period. This was a total waste of energy in those moments when the situation could swing one way or another!

Thiers commented on this circus in these terms: *“Without the help of the mayors and a few deputies in Paris who managed to amuse the people at city hall (Central Committee) for ten days we would have been lost.”*

And yet in March movements of insurrection sprang up or sprang back up in Lyons, Marseilles, Narbonne, Toulouse, St. Etienne, Creusot! The isolation of Paris needs to be seen as something relative in this movement of struggle which touched so many cities and regions in France. This was particularly the case where the workers' movement had shown its strength as early as 1868 and where the IWA's influence was noteworthy. Yet all of these movements followed the example of Paris, remaining confused and dispersed. The militants themselves were unable to give a clear impulsion to this simmering revolutionary energy. There was hardly any attempt to understand all of these attempts at insurrection as being part of the same struggle, directed against the old world. There was even less of an attempt at assuming the necessity of coordinating and centralizing these struggles. In the same way, not a single one of the Central Committee members would push for a break with the Central Committee, giving the perspective of organizing outside of and against this structure. On March 24th the Central Committee called on Eudes, Brunel, and Duval to take over military leadership. But by then the situation was already inextricable. They took over a structure which had been emptied of its principal strength. It would only play a superficial role in the course of events to follow.

The Commune government elections were programmed for March 26th. Proletarians who had had their eyes on the Central Committee would now have their eyes on the Commune government elections. They were taken in by the electoral masquerade. They delegated all of their strength to these patented bourgeois. From one trap to another!

The Commune government at work

The very function of this government, in continuity with the Central Committee's practice, was the disorganization of the animated forces of the proletariat and the reinforcement of the polarization between Paris and Versailles, two bourgeois fractions whose common and fundamental objective was the struggle against the movement of insurrection. The Thiers government aimed to crush the insurgent proletariat before any reorganization of the State. The Commune government tried to establish social harmony through a reform program with socialist and humanist coloring so as to better put the proletariat to sleep. The functions of these two fractions were complementary. But the Thiers fraction needed time. From a military standpoint it wasn't ready at the time. It reorganized the army by putting the Versailles soldiers back into barracks and away from the insurgent population. Thousands of soldiers that were considered unreliable got kicked out of the army. Others were sent to Algeria as early as March 19th to participate in the repression against the

movement of insurrection in Kabylie. Cops and stool pigeons kept an eye on the soldiers. The point was to make fear and discipline the tools for shaping these proletarians, beneath their uniforms, into soldiers capable of massacring other proletarians without a moment's hesitation.

In the evening of April 2nd Versailles took back the initiative, attacking Courbevoie and taking control of the Neuilly bridge in order to prevent the Federates from reaching supplies and to prevent the revolutionary contagion from spreading. In this classical military confrontation the National Guards were no match for Versailles. This did no good for morale. For Versailles however it was quite the opposite. This attack allowed them to both feel and seal the unity of their army. They felt like they were on top of the world. For the first time proletarians' faith in the Commune government was put to the test when they discovered that there was no plan for counter-attack. The Commune government revealed the line of action it would keep until the end: inactivity, motionlessness, which would facilitate the coming massacre. Proletarians in reaction massively poured out of red neighborhoods shouting "To Versailles!": This pressure pushed the Blanquists Eudes, Duval, and Bergeret to decide – outside of and against the Commune government which at the time was legislating on the question of the "separation of Church and State" - to organize a sally. The government abstained from committing itself to this sally despite the widespread eagerness and the hatred against Versailles. Everything was lacking in terms of organization. Nothing had been foreseen. No supplies. No ammunition. No serious artillery to back them up. No means of liaison. On April 3rd at 3 o'clock in the morning three columns headed resolutely towards Versailles. Shells were fired from Mont Valérien hitting the Bergeret column but without making many casualties. Nonetheless these shells provoked a movement of panic. The proletarians had expected an easy victory. The Versailles troops took back the initiative. The Versailles troops shot prisoners. It was a disaster. There was no autonomous structure to conceive the attack as an act of class war which would have avoided the front against front battlefield and which would have undermined the enemy's base by developing revolutionary defeatism. The chance to pursue the Versailles troops in the first days after March 18th had passed by. The failure of the April 3rd sally rang the bell for the proletariat's capacity to reverse the balance of forces between the classes and to spread the revolution, to distance itself from the Commune government and to develop its class autonomy. From that moment on the war was transformed. The war of class against class would become a bourgeois war against the proletariat.

Bourgeois war or class war!

On March 29th a military commission replaced the Central Committee of the National Guard so as to assert the Commune government's control of the National Guard. This commission was in charge of discipline, arms, clothes, and equipment for the National Guard. Different tendencies within the government criticized the "disorganization" of this commission: "*Active, dedicated men exhaust themselves in irritating struggles against the offices, the committees, the sub-committees, the thousand different pretentious spokes of rival administrations and waste a whole day just trying to get a canon delivered. [...] The arms service was unable to provide bolt action rifles for all of the men in the campaign. After the victory the Versailles troops found 285,000 of these, plus 190,000 flintlock rifles, 14,000 Enfield rifles.*" We can see that in reality this bureaucracy consciously aimed to stop any initiative by the proletariat towards self-organization and to put the monopoly of arms back into the Commune government's hands.

Despite all of this there was some resistance raised to the militarization process. Small groups disobeyed the enlistment instructions and tried to keep the initiative "*without anyone having ordered it or authorized their creation an irregular army, recruited on a volunteer basis [...] spontaneously proliferated, especially in May. We can count thirty or so such as the "the*

Montmartre Rogues”, the “Flourens Avengers”, the Bergeret Scouts”, the “Montrouge Volunteers”, the “Rogue Soldiers of the Revolution”, the Turcos of the Commune”.

On April 8th the Commune government started taking action against this resurgence. It made a census of the population, carried out searches, and hunted down deserters. It decreed the general mobilization of all men between 18 and 40, their enlistment in newly reformed units of the National Guard and then sent them to the front against the Versailles troops! Condemnations for insubordination or desertion, the court-martial and other disciplinary measures which are indispensable for maintaining order in a bourgeois army were put back in place.

Obviously defending Paris one front against another could only lead to the victory of the one with the greatest military power which in this case was Thiers. Thiers continued to have access to the money of the Bank of France so as to reorganize his army. He managed to get 60,000 prisoners back from Bismarck and he was also given the authorization to raise a contingent of 130,000 soldiers to take Paris back.

The less well armed proletariat can only win the battle through harassing done by small mobile units delivering blows where they are least expected. Proletarians had perceived the change in the nature of this war and early on they started a movement of desertion, refusing to march straight into a massacre. A minority among them saw clearly how their loss was completely organized, that the front had no other purpose than to use them as cannon fodder. They became draft dodgers and their position was qualified as “cowardly”, “treason”, “lazy” even by Red club militants. For most proletarians the front remained a line of defense of the bastion of the revolution.

The decrees of the Commune government

Official history presents the Commune government's decrees as a radical calling into question of the old order, as the embryo of a revolution of society which didn't have the opportunity to fully develop...because of Thier's offensive. Nothing could be further from the truth. The new managers just wanted to get the economy going and manage labor force without breaking with the logic of value, of private property, of exploitation through labor. The function of these reformist decrees was to keep the proletariat calm, to make it wait passively, to dispossess it of its struggle.

To start, it's important to undo the myth about the much adored March 21st decree on pawnshops. The Commune government pursued its predecessor's policy of running pawnshops. It made it clear that if your loan was for less than 50 francs you could return to the pawnshop and ask for your things back without any reimbursement. But this measure by no means called into question this way of lending for interest. In addition, shortly thereafter the Commune government accepted to lower this policy to 20 francs and promised to reimburse the pawnshop administration itself. *“Destroying the pawnshop would be a blow against private property, which we have so far never done. I do not believe it would be wise, useful, intelligent to proceed that way.”* The Commune government's true concern was reflected here in the words of its Finance deputy, Jourde.

On March 24th the Central Committee decided to maintain the city toll – tax on commodities taken at the city gates. This tax was historically hated by proletarians. On July 13th 1789 proletarians, pushed by hunger, attacked the toll stations in Paris, looted them and then set fire to them. In September 1870 revolutionaries had suppressed the city toll in Lyons! On April 3rd in the *Journal Officiel* in complete continuity with their concern about collecting taxes the Commune government announced that *“until a new law decides the most equitable way to manage everybody's participation in the Republic's expenses we count on you to make the payment of your contribution to the Commune tax collection office.”* That is the decision of the government which came out of the March 26th elections: tax proletarians and don't even think of touching the Bank of France and

its three billion francs (of which 300 million were in cash, ready for the taking).

The Bank of France was at no time threatened. This was a flagrant expression of the respect for private property and capitalist logic. This is all the more incredible in that it would have been easy to take it over. The day after March 18th in Paris no force could have opposed an attack on the Bank of France. Varlin submitted the question to the Central Committee which speedily voted. "No. Of course not!" On April 1st armed Federates took the cash box from a city toll station. As some Central Committee members had been involved Varlin protested against this "*encroachment to power by some members of the Central Committee*". On April 21st a part of the 208th battalion got the cash box of the Gas Company. The Commune government hurried to recuperate the cash box and return it without a penny missing. In order to deal with public spending the Commune government begged The Bank of France for twenty million francs. In the meantime Thiers, who was well outside of Paris, received two hundred fifty eight million! These few elements show us that contrary to those who speak about the *error* of not taking over the Bank of France it was this government's democratic nature which was responsible for not doing so.

The amount of respect for private property (banks, workshops, lodging, etc.) was dramatic. J. Allemane remarked during the *bloody week* "*The fighters prefer getting killed behind their tiny retrenchments rather than invading houses, making holes in the walls, making tunnels to protect them from being encircled...*"

The French section of the IWA's program remained very Proudhonian. The abolition of private property was out of the question for them. Proudhon himself declared: "*I don't intend to suppress but to socialize private property; that is, to reduce it into small companies and to strip it out its power*".

Moreover the Commune government had new coins made, marked with the captions "God protects France" and "Labor, National Guarantee". The Paris stock exchange reopened on March 28th.

This government had also intended to establish an identity card for each citizen. But it didn't have the time to carry this out!

The decree on rent was adopted on March 29th. It was miserable. Not only did it not suppress rent pure and simple but it suppressed merely the last three payments, leaving proletarians to deal with their landlords.

The April 2nd decree on the requisition of religious belongings and the separation of Church and State meant in reality that the Commune government wouldn't attack Church belongings (neither more nor less than it would those of bankers or industrialists). There was even a law guaranteeing damages for bosses whose proletarians "used" the workshops which the bosses themselves had abandoned! The Commune government never touched the factories which the exploiters had continued running.

On April 20th one rare decree, similar in this respect to the one on pawnshops, inspired sympathy. It abolished night work in bakeries and suppressed the role of the middleman who received an amount of money from each worker for whom he found a job. Bakery workers had led many strikes during the Second Empire and were compelled to continue their struggle under the Commune government in order to win their case. On April 8th 1871 they sent a petition to the Commune government which went unanswered. On April 20th three hundred of them were compelled to demonstrate in front of city hall and they threatened to break their ovens in order to gain satisfaction. This decree was urgently adopted. It is worshiped by the those who idolize the Commune government. It was nonetheless a decree already being studied two years prior under the Second Empire. Although this measure did bring about some temporary relief in terms of bakers' work rhythm the Commune government did not go so far as to lift the ban on strikes nor did it intervene in any way regarding the miserable wages common in this profession. Moreover, the government maintained the workbook which had inspired so much hatred after it was instituted under the Empire.

On April 24th a decree on the requisition of empty apartments was adopted under the pressure of ongoing events: the necessity of housing the inhabitants of Neuilly who had fled the Versailles troops' cannon fire. But the proletarians were kept in their own miserable neighborhoods keeping Paris divided in two: the bourgeois in the west and the proletarians in the east.

Not one of these decrees sought to respond to the necessities of the extension and defense of the revolution except for one, the decree on hostages...which was never applied!

The Commune government's will to always act within the framework of legality, respect for rights, and concern for the restoration of social peace can be seen in the genesis of this decree. In the evening of April 4th members of the Commune government learned that Commune fighters who had been captured during the disastrous sally the day before were being tortured and murdered. The most determined among the assembly, drunk with rage, cried for vengeance and wanted to shoot the captured Versailles hostages. That is when Protot, the Justice delegate, intervened "*We cannot answer a massacre with a massacre [...] What we can do is to make a legal resolution, write, discuss, adopt, and if we approve it we will have a proposition which may institute retaliation while remaining within the limit of the law.*" He threw a bucket of cold water on those who were burning for vengeance. So much so that the very same ones who had been calling for vengeance ended up applauding Protot and asked him to write a decree on hostages which ended up extremely harsh...on paper!

This decree was never applied. It was merely a political maneuver to calm the proletarians who cried for vengeance. As soon as the Versailles troops learned this they began torturing again: They raped. They killed the wounded. They packed others into sinister jails. It wasn't until the middle of the *bloody week* that proletarians would decide to put counter-terror into practice, shooting a few hostages on May 26th. Once more, those who had been behind this decree opposed this act with all of their might.

The proletariat's growing weakness

After its application many proletarians took advantage of the decree on rent by not paying their next rent and leaving in the night! But things didn't go any farther. There wasn't even the beginning of a more offensive movement of negation of private property through the occupation of bourgeois apartments.

After the application of the decree on pawnshops well-behaved proletarians waited to get their things back. Out of 1,800,000 goods only 41,928 were ever taken back. Only three days were allowed to do this. On the second day a threatening crowd of women appeared, demanding to speed things up. The National Guards loyal to the government reacted by protecting the pawnshop, this institution built on sucking the blood out of proletarians' last possessions.

Nevertheless, the revolution continued to express itself in Vigilance committees, Red clubs...That was where the clearest demands of the moment were being made: execution of hostages, giving arms to women, surveillance of the suburbs against spies, suppression of the Church and arrest of the clergy, requisition of the means of production, organization of forces against Versailles, preparation of brigades.

Different initiatives were taken to strengthen the movement's autonomy such as the creation in the middle of April of the *Union of Women for the Defense of Paris and of Care for the Wounded* or in

early May the creation of a *Federation of clubs*. These initiatives sought to take the situation into hand, to respond to the growing confusion, to organize revolutionary energies. But the situation was seriously marked by dispersion, distraction, a heated atmosphere in which a lot of radical impulses and fiery speeches were left without ever amounting into anything. This new surge of energy was limited. It was unable to go against the direction which the Commune government had given. It was unable to defend Paris against the growing threat posed by the Versailles forces. Proletarians were held up by their confidence in the government even if they did qualify the government's action as "sluggish". Despite their criticism proletarians thought the Commune government had the means to be the master of the situation and demanded that it take the necessary steps. It was not until the *bloody week*, when these same proletarians would have a knife at their throats, that they would lose their illusions concerning "*the bourgeois soul, full of selfishness and cold cruelty*".

The Public Health Committees

April 1871. The government's shining image had grown pale after all it had done to prevent a surge in combativeness through the deliberate organization of the defeat. A low in morale gained ground. The proletarians were tired of the ceaseless bombing by the Versailles troops who were just a few rifle shots' distance out of Paris. They were sick of the lack of organization of a retaliation and of the means to do so - contradictory orders, positions won and then abandoned, mistakes in the maintaining of the outposts, the carelessness in the surveillance of the ramparts,...the goal here was simply to tire out the proletariat.

On May 1st a Public Health Committee was instituted by the government so as to seriously get the defense of Paris back under hand. This new aim of organizing military retaliation reinforced the proletariat's passive attitude which saw in this committee its savior. But this committee did nothing and the military setbacks increased. On May 9th the committee, having shown itself to be nothing short of ridiculous, was disbanded. Then it was put back together again. The new structure produced the same results as before...

Outbreak of struggles in the country

In April, while the deputies were voting, chatting away and fooling around, in the country struggles were breaking out. The Parisian example had inspired others to imitate it. In Rouen, in the Havre, in Grenoble, in Nîmes, in Bordeaux, in Perigueux, in Varilhes...and in many other towns and villages proletarians recognized themselves in the struggle of the proletarians in Paris. Proletarians attacked town halls and confronted troops to the shouts of "Long live the Commune! Down with Versailles!". The movement was spreading like wildfire. Powerful diversions were organized in the center, east, west, and south of France: creating disorder in train stations, preventing the arrival of troops to Paris who were bound to encircle the city. The threat of a powerful solidarity with Paris could be felt. All over Europe the working class followed the news from Paris intensely and in their hearts fought along side those who were in the city which had become a capitol for them all. Meetings, processions, speeches increased. Despite the little means at its disposal the proletarian press struggled courageously against the slander in the bourgeois press. Alas, nothing was organized so as to coordinate or give a qualitative leap to this great potential. On the contrary, the Commune government only sent delegates who were completely foreign to this need to unify all of the struggles.

A struggle's survival inevitably depends on its development and extension! A movement of insurrection which remains locked up in one place cannot resist the bourgeois forces which will inevitably come together to fight it. The only perspective is to break out of isolation and to avoid at

all costs falling into a war of front against front in which the bourgeoisie will always have superior firepower. That is why broadening the movement was so important, so crucial. That is why it was criminal to have not assumed this responsibility.

The *bloody week*

The coming together of two things made the *bloody week*, the military crushing of the movement, possible: the disarming of the proletariat by the Commune government and the determination of the Thiers fraction to rebuild an army to clean Paris of its "red vermin".

Thiers' task was to make soldiers capable of shooting unarmed proletarians and killing the wounded, to have them feel totally foreign to the struggle of their former class brothers. But even in that stage a reversal of the situation was still possible. It was still possible to break with the ranks and turn one's gun against those who were giving orders, counting the dead, calculating the war production, defining the political objectives of the massacre, and subsidiarily dreaming of the effect this would have on their careers. At that stage of the game simply laying down one's arms would have been suicide. The only possibility was to turn one's guns against one's own officers so as to give a change in the course of the confrontation: organizing the defeat of one's own army and fraternizing with the other side which had been, until then, the enemy to be eliminated.

The May 10th peace treaty concluded with Bismarck allowed Thiers to disengage troops from the east and bring them to Versailles. He had shown his capacity to put down revolt among the troops in the country. He had increased his troops from 25,000 to 130,000 men. The Versailles army was operational at the end of April. The agreement with Bismarck clearly shows how different bourgeois fractions are able to put aside their competitive differences and to act together when they need to fight the main enemy: the armed proletariat. From that point on, Thiers was the master of the situation. He was just waiting for the right moment to deliver the final blow.

On May 21st at 3 pm the Versailles army entered Paris through the Point du Jour entry in the southwest ramparts, which had been completely abandoned. The police and gendarmes, the National guard of Order, would be the ones to begin the first organized massacres. They proceeded methodologically: first the military advanced so as to conquer a number of important positions then the police and gendarmes who knew the city well would start searching and arresting (based on a list prepared ahead of time). They showed the soldiers which prisoners needed to be guarded before they were shot. Exceptional courthouses, called provost courts, were set up as the city was conquered. Barracks, prisons, train stations, public parks, schools were all used for this purpose.

At first the proletariat was surprised by the attack and didn't oppose any serious resistance. Then as they heard the first shots of the firing squads they started resisting valiantly. Without a general plan for defense they had to make do as best as they could. They called on proletarians from other neighborhoods. They didn't hesitate to set fire to certain buildings filled with meaning for bourgeois history as well as different points of centralization for the State. On May 26th at the Rue Haxo proletarians fed up with the massacres took priests, gendarmes, cops, Versailles spies out of prison and shot about sixty of them. At that moment the line dividing the classes, between the struggle and those who oppose it, was clearer than ever. At last these proletarians were acting openly against most of the members of the Commune government. Oh paradox! It was terrible to see a militant like Varlin oppose the execution of cops and priests when he himself would be dragged through the streets of Paris for hours, beaten, mutilated and finally shot! As blood started to flow over the Paris cobblestones the Commune government once more made bombastic declarations, calls for fraternization with the Versailles troops, without ever giving these calls the

slightest concrete form.

Social-democratic literature enjoys describing the *bloody week* in its morbid details, presenting it as an indiscriminate carnage, with no precise objective, and putting all of the responsibility on the soldiers' lust for blood...But this massacre was thought out, calculated, organized for weeks by the general chiefs of staff of the Versailles army. The cause of the majority of deaths were the result of court-martials and firing squads, much more than fierce combat. Mac-Mahon, Cissey, Douay, Vabre, Borel, Bruat, Failliffet, under Thier's high authority, coldly evaluated, calculated, organized the systematic extermination of the insurgents.

This systematic killing, cold and impersonal, was the fruit of a political will which matched the fear the bourgeoisie had had of losing its power. It inaugurated a new era of scientific repression. Its goal was two fold: annihilating the revolutionary surge which was spreading like fever and reinforcing the principle of authority by the perfection of repressive units as a potential strength that could be unleashed at the first sign of revolutionary upheaval. Such a massacre inscribes itself for a long time in memory, in the body. With the thread of time the proletariat would transmit and reproduce this fear. The fear of repression causes it to hesitate to wholeheartedly return to the path of struggle. It hesitates, beats around the bush, and for the moment accepts the rules of the game imposed by the bourgeoisie: democratic mechanisms. Social-democracy holds the main role in the development of the submission to the democratic rules of the game. It did its best to get proletarians to reject the perspective of the destruction of the old world through insurrection. Starting with the first commemorations of the Commune (starting in 1878) social-democracy laid out the horrors committed by the counter-revolution so as to promote its pacifistic political strategy of which the central axis is the conquest of political power through the ballot box. Riots, barricades, and other violent confrontations against the State are presented as old-fashioned, good for nothing but being exhibited in the museum of things which we have gone beyond, things of the bygone days. It insists on the idea that these sorts of acts have never led to anything except a pitiless repression. Even today it's in the name of "no provocation" that social-democrats protect the State.

Elements of Conclusion

Based on the struggle's defeat, social-democracy would like to convince us that struggling radically is vain. Our conclusion is quite to the contrary. We wish to emphasize that between the first clashes and the *bloody week* the movement went through a whole development, a dynamic of reinforcement, an intensification of class contradictions – all of this cannot be swept away under the pretext that in the end the movement was defeated.

In France in 1870-71 it was the proletariat which stopped the imperialist war in which the French and Prussian empires were about to be engulfed. The proletariat imposed a balance of forces which led the French State as well as the Prussian State to abandon their warmongering projects. The two belligerent fractions were forced to give up their respective positions and agree in order to fight the proletarian insurrection which tended to generalize throughout France. The bourgeoisie was compelled to put aside its particular disagreements, its competitive aims, and unite its efforts in order to fight the rising revolutionary movement. The main enemy had become: the proletarian insurrection, so the objective was to defeat the revolution and destroy the perspective of communism.

The limits of this great show of vitality which called into question the old world imposed themselves and led it dramatically to its defeat. The bourgeoisie was weakened and nearly put to flight....On March 18th soldiers refused to fire on insurgents and turned their arms upon the generals

who had ordered them to shoot. The movement had reached a number of cities throughout France. Yet not a single measure was taken until April 2nd in order to consolidate the balance of forces which was conquered on March 18th. No measure was taken so as to organize the struggle's extension, to keep the initiative as the army was falling apart, to organize the defense of insurgent Paris!

The army was completely falling apart, as was emphasized earlier. Show of indiscipline, refusal to follow orders, display of disrespect for hierarchy...multiplied. But nobody took advantage of these signs of the army's decomposition in order to organize the army's lasting defeat and to rally all those who were still hesitating to join the revolution once and for all. It is in this respect that it was so important to pursue the bourgeois troop fleeing off to Versailles. Some positions leaning in this direction were expressed but they were expressed by only a small minority and remained poorly organized. Attempts at assuming this necessity – such as the April 3rd sally – were taken in the belief that they were supported by the Commune government. This illusion would prove to be fatal.

April 3rd was already very late to react. Two weeks had already gone by since Thiers had negotiated the return of imprisoned troops with Bismarck, since Thiers had organized the siege of Paris. Thiers imposed allegiance to his project to put down the insurrection and take back Paris all over France. He did this through repression against the Communes which popped up here and there and through scheming against the bourgeois fractions which called into question his authority. The Central Committee of the National Guard's policy (just as the Commune government, the Public Health Committees, ...) blocked militant proletarians who sought to break out of Paris and so break with the movement's isolation and their efforts to take back the offensive. These militants ended up by acting against these structures' directives but without clearly assuming the fact that in order to fully assume their initiatives making a clean break with such structures would be a necessity. They persevered in believing that these committees and the government were going to support them, that it was all just a problem of poor coordination in decision making, of information not being properly relayed, of a few particularly incompetent people...Worse still, after this disastrous sally the avant-garde militants who had taken part in this initiative and who had made it back – many had lost their lives – did not draw lessons from this defeat.

Not just in France but all of the world, class contradictions caused innumerable impulses to struggle to pop up here and there. But *the proletariat was not conscious of its strength*. That is the key to all of the revolution's radical development – *going from an instinctive class action to a consciousness of why and when to struggle*. This is the reason why generous proletarian energy affirms each time more strongly the necessary and indispensable character of militant activity in trying to clarify the movement's objectives, the revolutionary preparation of insurrection. This was partially assumed by the militant forces present in the movement.

It is important to emphasize the determining presence of these militants who had long been organized, accustomed to confrontation, enriched with lessons of the past were able to, at times, contribute to giving a qualitative leap to the process of marking the dividing line between the classes, despite the terrible limits which confined their actions.

Notes on the IWA, the Blanquists, and other militants

It isn't always so easy in a movement of this scale to determine where the strongest moments of the struggle were, when they were, and exactly how were – the most advanced points of rupture with the national consensus and how these ruptures were crystallized, structured, organized through the forces who carried them. In other words, how did the proletariat, emerging out of the cesspool of nationalism, the pit of social-democracy, manage to affirm itself as a class, manage to affirm its own

dynamic, and organize itself as a force, as the party.

In order to determine the places and the structures where revolutionary energies were expressed and organized we ought to start by eliminating the judgments – and there are many of them – in which sanctions are made against different actions purely on the basis of the formal membership of the militants or groups of militants which carried them out – belonging to such a current, such an association, such a party...

The experience of the Commune showed us very clearly that the IWA's mark, just as for the Blanquist militants' mark, was not always synonymous with radical rupture from the Commune government's program. So it is important not to content ourselves with titles, flags, self-proclaiming, or even the presence of such or such political entity or such or such militant in order to analyze an event, an action, a confrontation, a position.

It is important to start from the real movement of class confrontation from which militant forces emerge. At times these forces may bear decisive ruptures, contributing to a qualitative leap in marking the dividing line between the classes and their fundamentally opposed objectives. At other times these forces may get mixed up in pacifistic consensus, contributing thus to the general confusion and the proletariat's loss of autonomy.

We reject all analysis which refuses to recognize a revolutionary character to the proletariat's expressions except when these expressions make an explicit reference to their own ideological prejudices. For example, Marxist ideology defends the Paris federation of the IWA as *the* representative of the party of the proletariat in the Commune, because of its membership in the IWA of which Marx was a part.

This way of proceeding prevents one from making any evaluation of the direction which the IWA Paris federation militants were giving to the movement. It also prevents one from taking into consideration any expression or movement which, without belonging to the IWA, may have, at some time, shown itself to have had a clearer perception. The point of view which we denounce does not base itself on different militants' real practice but only on their membership in such or such current, association, party. This is essentially idealist in that its starting point is the idea (having been conceived beforehand) of the movement rather than the movement itself.

However, we try to evaluate the most clairvoyant and organized forces of the proletariat based on their capacity or incapacity to affirm the proletariat's revolutionary essence, its social project which by its very nature is the negation in act of the existing social order – the abolition of classes, of labor, of capital, of State – and the affirmation of the need for communism – a society without money, without exchange, without private property...a reaffirmation of the human community.

Concretely, in that at the beginning of a class confrontation the dominant ideology is that of the dominant class the clarification of the proletariat's revolutionary objectives is always undertaken by minorities.

The evaluation of the proletariat's effort at organizing consists then in the evaluation of the real capacity of these minorities to put forth proletarian objectives in the struggle, making the movement of the abolition of the existing order clearer. More concretely, concerning the movement in France in 1870-71 we wish to evaluate the revolutionary minorities' capacity to distinguish itself from republican bourgeois forces, from the Commune government and to evaluate its capacity to develop the proletariat's autonomy, to work towards the extension of the movement, to centralize all of the different expressions of struggle into one single expression, to organize the insurrection against all bourgeois forces present.

Different forces and structures of militant energy came out of this movement. Some of them existed beforehand such as the Paris federation of IWA and the Blanquist militants. Others rose up out of the immediate context such as the revolutionary Clubs, Vigilance Committees, National Guard Red Battalions, Belleville Rogue Soldiers, Flourens Avengers, Union of Women for the Defense of

Paris,...Each of these forces, as well as their totality, expressed the process of the constitution of the proletariat's party.

Those who are sometimes called the “partyless” militants or groups of militants were also a part of this process. They may not have been members in a precise organization but their presence, their dynamism, their acts, their positions were part of the multiple concrete expressions of this process. Not all of the forces in this process had the same importance, the same impact, the same responsibility.

In that the Blanquists and the Paris federation of the IWA had been constituted before the movement's explosion in Paris and in that they had benefited from the experience of past struggles on both a national and an international level they thus bore a greater responsibility for how the movement's force would express and organize itself.

That is why we are going to take the time and the space here, in addition to what we've already developed in the previous chapters, to analyze these two militant forces more closely – their strong points, their limits, and above all their practice during the movement, their capacity to galvanize the proletariat's forces, to clarify the movement's objectives, to go further in the rupture between nationalism and internationalism, between republic and revolution.

The International Working Men's Association constituted an attempt by the proletariat to give itself a common international direction. It was extremely important to give a material response to the need to centralize struggles beyond borders. Despite the fact that it only concerned the “civilized world” it was the strongest expression of proletarian internationalism in the 19th century.

It was precisely this dimension which frightened the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie led an international campaign starting in May 1871 hunting down all of the IWA's militants, seeking to destroy this threat. This reaction is much more an expression of the fear inspired by the potential force of a united proletariat, much more than of what the IWA really succeeded in organizing. For the bourgeoisie what was at stake was far more than just destroying the perspective of each conflict which it did easily so long as it remained isolated. What was at stake was the destruction of the proletariat's confidence in its capacity to organize itself and oppose the bourgeoisie as an international force – indeed, it was a question of destroying the very idea of proletarian internationalism structured as a powerful force.

The repression against militants of the German branch of the IWA who had, in July 1870, demonstrated their opposition to the Franco-Prussian War is an example. Affirming proletarian internationalism on both sides of the border at the moment of the general mobilization of the bourgeois armies and the war which Bismarck and Napoleon III were about to carry out was for the bourgeoisie a matter of court-martial.

Marx had finished writing the first “Address of the General Council of the IWA on the Franco-Prussian War” on July 23rd eight days after France and Germany had plunged the proletariat into war. The text emphasized passages of resolutions which had been adopted by German workers such as the following:

“We are happy to grasp the fraternal hand stretched out to us by the workmen of France...Mindful of the watchword of the International Working Men's Association: Proletarians of all countries, unite, we shall never forget that the workmen of all countries are our friends and the despots of all countries our enemies.”

“We join with heart and hand your protestation...Solemnly, we promise that neither the sound of the trumpets, nor the roar of the cannon, neither victory nor defeat, shall divert us from our common work for the union of the children of toil of all countries.”

But the pacifistic illusions which pervaded these declarations against the war caused them to remain nothing more than declarations. For the proletariat in Germany the war meant giving up its strikes, giving up its intentions of fraternization, and undergoing a greater level of misery.

Recognizing the “defensive” character of the war fought on the Prussian side (and thus one reason for which proletarians should have had for supporting it) is one of the reasons for which the IWA was so inconsistent in its struggle against the war! This “defensive” character was all the more bizarre in that the army led by Bismarck would quickly cross the border and defeat the French army on its own territory. In any case, situating oneself in the position of supporting the advance of capital's army was situating oneself against the proletariat!

As we saw earlier the Paris federation of the IWA lapsed into the exaltation of patriotism. The Blanquists did not escape this nationalist fever as it gave birth to the newspaper *La Patrie en Danger* (The Nation in Danger) on September 7th 1870. Generally speaking during these events very few militants saw the situation clearly and escaped getting sucked in - so few that getting sucked in to nationalist fever was even the norm!

Thus we can see how particular situations, local contingencies, can end up getting the upper hand and create confusion among militants to such a degree that they can go so far as to giving up a key position of the proletariat, the expression of its very essence: a worldwide class with its very own interests which are irremediably antagonistic to those of the bourgeoisie. This means that all struggles, no matter where they take place, no matter what the particular conditions are in which they are expressed – all of these struggles are one and the same – they are fundamentally of the same nature and possess the same objective. That is what defines internationalism. This means that the immediate needs of struggle are:

- the abolition of borders of all sorts, sectoral, geographic, political or otherwise and
- the organization of the defeat of bourgeoisie, whether it is republican or bonapartist and no matter what its particular position may be in the world chessboard.

All patriotism necessarily leads us to choose the side of one bourgeois fraction or another and to take up arms against our class brothers. Any particularism leads to denying the unique and worldwide character of the proletarian class.

Just as the events showed us: communalism, the will to stick to the management of local affairs, was indeed a moment of affirmation of particularism in total opposition to an international and internationalist point of view. Paradoxically, the Internationals of the IWA defended communalism in France.

In a manifesto from May 1869 the French branch of the IWA extolled:

“Communes, departments, and colonies liberated from all supervision concerning local affairs, administered by freely elected representatives...”

In September 1870 in what is considered to be the French branch of the IWA's program they defended: *“What we all want is that each commune may regain its municipal independence and govern itself in the midst of a free France. Still more, we want the Federation of communes.”*

On March 25th 1871 Varlin answered an emissary of Bakunin:

“...this has nothing to do with an internationalist revolution, the March 18th movement had no other demand than that of the municipal emancipation of Paris and that this goal had been met; that elections had been scheduled for the next day, the 26th, and that once the Municipal Council was elected then the Central committee would resign from its powers and all would be done.”

In May 1871 H. Goullé, a member of the IWA, reaffirmed

“The only way out that remains open for us is the federation of the Communes of France.”

As the events have shown us these positions dramatically contributed to keeping the struggle confined to Paris as well as supporting the criminal policy of the Commune government.

Before the declaration of war the Paris federation of the IWA grouped together almost all of the combative workers in the capitol. This was thanks to the organizing efforts and the centralization of struggles by certain militants such as Varlin, Héliçon, Combault, André Murat, Theisz, etc. for years.

During the many strikes of 1866-67 and 1869-70 proletarians joined the IWA massively. But that was not enough for these newly created sections to become an active force. In most cases they collapsed once the strike was over. The number of active militants was modest: about 2,000 at the time. This is why we can say that the IWA was a shining force but not yet an organized and powerful body which militants such as Varlin in Paris, Aubry in Rouen, Richard in Lyons, Bastelica in Marseille and others would take on the task of transforming it into. Among the things they did to achieve this was participating in workers' societies and the federal chamber of workers' societies in Paris. All of this activity resulted in the radicalization of at least a minority within the Paris federation of the IWA.

But after the declaration of war the events would extol the IWA's least clear positions. The French branch of the IWA was strongly influenced by Proudhonism, an ideology of management of which communalism is an expression. Communalism sought the emancipation of communes from central State supervision. This sort of emancipation had nothing to do with class relations, exploitation or submission. What did this municipal emancipation demanded by the communalists corresponded to? It corresponded to nothing but a greater freedom of movement for the circulation of commodities. Indeed, it was federalism, cooperativism, mutualism...which led the IWA astray from the fundamental calling into question of the foundations of the capitalist social relationship: the dispossession of the means of living and enslavement to labor.

The list is long: critical support for the Republic, acceptance to take seat in the national assembly in Bordeaux, participation in the campaign to elect a Commune government, respect for private property and financial institutions, positions against the creation of an irregular force outside of the National Guard and a position against the execution of hostages...

There was undeniably a great gap between the revolutionary force of the 1870-71 movement and the management politics to which the IWA Paris federation militants confined their schemes. In the heat of the events these militants were unable to undo their Proudhonist illusions and for the most part evolved in the shadows of the left republican bourgeois.

Very few of these militants would rekindle the fire which had burned in them during their activity before 1870. This fire which had burned in them had brought them to assume a role of leadership of the proletariat through their practice of organizing strikes and other expressions of the real movement of emancipation of wage slavery.

We must not hesitate to affirm that these militants' practice after March 18th was frankly counter-revolutionary – when they refused to attack the Bank of France, or when they refused to apply measures of counter-terror, which were the only measures capable, for a time, of calming down the bellicose fever of the Versailles army. A certain lacking of clarity in a period of relative social peace can have no real counter-revolutionary outcome. But in crucial moments it may have a completely different impact and may turn into an effective force for counter-revolution. This

incapacity to distinguish itself from republicanism had a great impact on the Paris federation of the IWA. This incapacity was reinforced by the stand taken by the IWA international bureau in the *Second address of the general council of the International Working Men's Association on the Franco-Prussian War* which Marx finished writing on September 9th 1870 which proclaimed:

“The French working class moves, therefore, under circumstances of extreme difficulty. 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. [...] Let them calmly and resolutely improve the opportunities of Republican liberty, for the work of their own class organization [...] Upon their energies and wisdom hinges the fate of the Republic.”

The third *Address of the general council of the IWA on the civil war in France in 1871* which had been finished May 31st 1871 marked a change in the IWA's position. The repression which Thiers had led left the streets of Paris full of corpses. It was time to draw up a balance sheet. Marx recognized that it was a war led against the proletariat. He denounced the collusion between Bismarck and Thiers in the encirclement of Paris and in the peace accords in which the restitution of imprisoned French troops was negotiated in order to reinforce the French army. Was it too early to distinguish the proletariat's expression in the Commune from bourgeois politics, which in its acts was akin to Thier's intrigue? The border between revolution and counter-revolution, as we emphasized earlier, wasn't between Paris and Versailles but within the Commune itself, between the insurgent proletariat and the Commune government. In that the Commune government worked towards the disorganization and the disarming of the insurgent proletariat it placed itself on the same side as those who would make the final attack: Thiers with Bismarck's aid. Nowhere was this mentioned in the third address. Universal suffrage, municipal freedom, and the whole of the Commune government's reforms were proclaimed without the least amount of distance. What had caused this lack of judgment? The repression against all those more or less involved in the Paris Commune, the shock of the news announcing thousands of executions, the letters in blood describing the agony in the last barricades. Undoubtedly.

In general bourgeois historiography- books, brochures, newspaper articles written after the fact – has given a much bigger to the role played by IWA members whereas the Blanquists end up relegated to a secondary role. The reason for this is that these historians operate in the same way that social-democracy has always operated: presenting the movement's pitfalls as the strongest moments and presenting the moments when the proletariat was really a danger for bourgeois domination as the least interesting moments, something not to be remembered, or, worse still, as condemnable deviations.

In the IWA they valued precisely everything which we have emphasized as its limits: managementism, communalism, reformism, republicanism...all of these democratic mechanisms which absorbed militants' energy, dulled their judgment, and moved them away from from the needs of class against class struggle.

The only thing they remember about the Blanquists is their clear decision to organize insurrection. They do not wish to give any value to that clarity, of course, except in the sense of : What can we do so that the proletariat does not remember this point as an unavoidable necessity of struggle? How can we divert it from the path of this decision? With social-democracy this has been dealt with through years of propaganda in favor of universal suffrage. Class against class confrontation had to be abandoned and the path of parliamentarism had to be trusted. A new era of pacifistic progress towards socialism had begun. The *bloody week* was the proof for social-democracy that the

practice of insurrection was a lost cause. Any intransigence in struggle, any attempt to organize self-defense or counter-terror were promptly denounced as “Blanquism”. “Blanquism” was the label under which anything for which social-democracy felt contempt was classified. It was brandished like a black plague which threatened those proletarians who might give in to the temptation to fight back, blow for blow.

But what about the real practice of **Blanquist militants**?

What we call the Blanquists was the constitution of a group of revolutionaries around Auguste Blanqui starting in 1865. They intervened in different milieus (at first among the free masons, at non-religious funerals, then later in strikes, demonstrations, public meetings, riots). We also use this name to refer to a clandestine organization of combat groups. There are several kinds of strong points in this group:

There is a clear distinction between social classes. Blanqui had always been clear about the irreconcilable antagonism between proletariat and bourgeoisie. In 1852 he wrote to Maillard denouncing the terminology *democrat* which he judged as being “*an instrument for schemers*”. Concerning those who used this term he wrote:

“This is why they ban the terms: proletarians and bourgeois. They have a clear and precise meaning. They say things categorically. That is what is so displeasing. They are rejected as civil war provocations. Isn't that reason enough to open your eyes? What have we been forced to do for so long if not civil war? And against who? Oh! That is precisely the question which they try to muddle up and confuse through the obscurity of words ; because it's a question of preventing the two enemy flags from being set one in front of the other, so as to swindle, after the fight, for the victorious flag the benefits of the victory and to allow the defeated to move gently to the side of the victors. They don't want the two adversary camps to be called by their real names: proletariat, bourgeoisie. Yet, they have no others.”

- A categorical rejection of alliances with republican and socialist bourgeois such as L. Blanc, Ledru-Rollin, Crémieux, Albert...who all had their own part of responsibility in the repression against the proletariat in 1848. The February 1851 London toast is a lapidary denunciation of these republicans. Here's an extract:

“What pitfall threatens the revolution of tomorrow?

The pitfall which fell into yesterday's pitfall: the deplorable popularity of the bourgeois disguised as orators.

Ledru-Rollin, Louis Blanc, Crémieux, Lamartine, Garnier-Pagès, Dupont de l'Eure, Flocon, Albert, Arago, Marrast!

Gloomy list! Sinister names, written in letters of blood on all of the cobblestones of democratic Europe!

It was the provisional government which killed the Revolution. On its shoulder rests the responsibility of all of the disasters, the blood of so many thousands of victims.”

- The necessity for the proletariat to organize clandestinely, to prepare insurrection.
- And the need to struggle so that the organization not be infiltrated (task successfully carried out by R.Rigault).

The fundamental aspect of all of the activity of the Blanquist militants was the necessity of preparing insurrection. All of his life Blanqui sought to give a qualitative leap to the movement, contrary to the idea which later went around according to which it was in spite of the balance of forces at the time. The different attempts at insurrection, May 12th and 13th 1839, August 14th, September 4th, and later December 1870, were not actions undertaken blindly, without serious analysis. It was during periods marked by demonstrations, confrontations with the police, that at one point the Blanquists decided to turn to action, after an intense preparation. It is not because these attempts failed that they should be thrown on the scrapheap. Those who agree to do so situate

themselves necessarily on the grounds of pacifistic reform of bourgeois society. As Emilio Lussu wrote:

“(...)There exists no thermometer which can scientifically measure its temperature and that's precisely what constitutes the unknown in any insurrection and the risky side which is involved in any revolution. If it weren't like this then an insurrection would be a reliable operation without risk or peril.”

In coherence with this goal, combat groups organized themselves clandestinely. In 1870 they were about 800 strong (out of a total of 2,000 to 3,000 militants in all), including 100 men armed with rifles. These groups were set up on the right bank of the river Seine by Jaclard, Duval, Genton covering neighborhoods such as Montmartre, La Chapelle, Belleville...and on the left bank they were set up by Eudes and Granger. It is remarkable to see that these groups were constituted on a local basis (by neighborhood) as well as on the basis of workshops (in metallurgy, in boiler works, in foundries).

In light of these activities it is no surprise to find the Blanquists in the front line to carry out energetic actions against the Empire, the National Defense government, and then against Versailles. Let us recall that it was around the Blanquists that the April 3rd sally was organized in order to break with the closing in of Paris and to take down Thiers and his clique. It was also around them that the few actions of counter-terror were organized so as to dissuade Thiers from continuing to humiliate, torture, and execute prisoners.

Blanquist militants, educated at the school of plotting and accustomed to clandestine struggle, constituted an organizational force. In 1870 they had been present in struggles for six years (forty for Blanqui). The eruptions of insurrection drove them to the forefront, to the front lines of confrontation. But once they found themselves at the head of the movement they were completely clueless. Their vision of insurrection was limited to an essentially military affair. The political dimension escaped them. What direction should the war against the bourgeoisie be given? Once the forces of repression (army, police, gendarmerie) are neutralized what should be done with the balance of forces? What should be done with the political forces in presence? What should be done with social relationships?

The limit of their conception of the insurrection was expressed by a non-assumption of the insurrection as a political act. Social-democracy also based itself on this limit so as to later amalgamate the Blanquists' practice during the Commune as “adventurist”, “putschist”, disconnected from struggle – this way of ridiculing their practice allowed social-democracy to give more weight to its will to eradicate any insurgent perspective from the proletariat's memory.

In concrete terms, in 1870-71 this military vision of the insurrection would cause the balance of forces in favor of the proletariat, and all of their efforts to that aim, to slip out of their hands.

They were at first lacking in distance concerning their evaluation of the Republic government and the National Defense government. They had the same problem later concerning their evaluation of the Central Committee of the National Guard and the Commune government. This had a lot of influence at very crucial moments and it was due to their separation between the political and the military.

We have already made mention of their patriotic compromise. In September 1870, as we emphasized, when the Empire was overthrown and the republic was declared, and the National Defense government was getting started not a single proletarian group was able to resist the call of

the patriotic sirens. The Blanquists took this to an even higher level by brutally abandoning the struggle against the enemy class and calling on the proletariat to put itself “without nuance or parties” in the service of the French nation! In *La Patrie est en Danger (The Nation is in Danger)*, calls for republican collaboration and national defense were side by side with the most awful racist madness associating France with civilization and reducing the “Kraut” to the role of a barbarian “with flat feet and the hands of a monkey”, disposing of “a meter more of intestines than we do”! The Blanquists' attitude in September 1870 was all the more harmful because through their previous revolutionary exploits they had gained a lot of credit in the eyes of the proletariat. It was this credit which at such a crucial moment as the contradiction between nationalism and communism allowed for national union to be consolidated, exactly what the bourgeoisie had been calling for so as to lead its war against Germany.

It was the Blanquists who assumed the principal attempts at giving a qualitative leap to the movement in Paris between January 1870 and May 1871 despite their limits which were also an expression of the general balance of forces. As we have shown throughout the events they were carried forwards by the movement. They assumed a real role in galvanizing the proletariat's combativeness. It's in this organizing effort that we recognize an expression of the party of proletariat as a general tendency to affirm itself as a class.

We have also seen how the lack of clarity concerning class objectives whether they be Blanquists or IWA members prevented them from making the necessary ruptures with republican forces. Most of the time they left the initiative to the bourgeoisie.

Their activity prior to July 1870 consisted in organizing precisely outside of bourgeois structures and in developing self-organization of the proletariat. But in the great haste of the events these militants lost this capacity. They had been accustomed to developing resistance in the shadows of omnipresent repression. They were surprised, disoriented, and overtaken by the course of the events. They weren't able to see things with the necessary distance to be able to adapt themselves to the new conditions of struggle. Each of these organizations lost the advantage of their accumulated experience. None of them were able to use the past as a force for the present. At certain moments they were walking on the razor's edge and at other times they had clearly fallen over to the side of counter-revolution. They expressed the proletariat's general incapacity to make a clean break with the structures which society put in place as answers to new situations as the events continued.

In fact the republican fraction was quite skillful. Each time the struggle became more radical they created new structures in answer. They were flexible enough to be able to adapt, jump back and bring the proletariat into the arena in which they alone defined the rules of combat. This capacity of adaptation – to the fall of the Empire, to the proclamation of the republic, to the National Defense government, to the Central Committee of the National Guard, to the elections, to the Commune government, to the Public Health Committees – managed to prevent clear outbursts and clear ruptures from taking place and in doing so it made the dividing line between bourgeoisie and proletariat hazy.

Within this framework the proletarian movement and its revolutionary minorities were disoriented. As soon as they struck a fatal blow to one bourgeois fraction they were completely baffled at how quickly another bourgeois fraction filled the vacant space. Although it was several times in the very front lines during the events the proletariat remained baffled when faced with the possibilities which offered it the possibility of taking the direction of the events and imposing its own class objectives. Although it showed a great combativeness it also showed a propensity for getting taken in by the republican promises.

Once more we can see that the combativeness is rarely what is lacking in the proletariat. What is lacking is the direction to give to its struggle, the definition of its class objectives.

As we have seen the proletarian movement's moments of affirmation, the strongest in clarity and decision and in rejection of bourgeois alternatives, were never upheld in a continuous way by such or such a militant structure, nor by such or such militant, nor by such or such organized body...neither the Blanquists nor the IWA, neither the Red clubs nor the irregular forces,...nor the "partyless". Each and every one of them shifted around back and forth across the dividing line between the classes, at times at the forefront of ruptures with the republican mob, while at other times full of one's responsibility as a member of the Commune government. Neither the Blanquist militants nor the IWA, neither the Red clubs nor the irregular army, nor the "partyless" neither on their own nor all together represented *the* proletariat's party during the movement of insurrection in Paris in 1870-71. These organizations were but incomplete, limited, and contingent concretions of party. They are an expression of the tendency to organize as the party.

Each of the moments strong in decision and clarity, each moment of rupture with republican consensus, upheld by some then by others – all of these moments are the expression of the living proletariat as it organizes itself as the party. It is a process during which proletariat becomes conscious of its strength, organizes itself more and more clearly, outside and against the structures of bourgeois State, putting forth its own class objectives, recognizing itself as a class and developing its own organizational structures.

In his February 2nd 1860 letter to Freilgrath Marx expressed this process concerning the wave of struggles during the years 1848-50:

"The League [League of Communists founded in 1847] just as the Society of Seasons in Paris, just as a hundred other such societies was but an episode in the history of the party which bursts forth from all sides and quite naturally from the soil of society."

Otherwise put, in order to evaluate the moments in which the party expressed itself in the Commune's history it is necessary to go back to the key moments of rupture during this struggle and to those who organically expressed the most totalizing perspectives, beyond the limit of such or such organization born during the midst of the struggle and necessarily carrying with them a lot of contradictions.

More generally, in history the party is manifest at a certain time and place by the presence in the struggle of a concentration of experiences of the proletariat's struggle. This becomes concrete as a living organized force aimed at defeating the enemy and imposing the dictatorship of human needs. This is a historical reality which expresses itself well beyond particular organizations which are born out of particular circumstances – and beyond the separation imposed by time and space between different generations of militants.

The proletariat's historical party refers to the whole of the expressions of yesterday, today and tomorrow which assume an organized practice of the defense of the proletarian objective of the destruction of wage slavery.

Taking into account a particular wave of struggle such as 1870-71 in France we recognize the affirmation of the party in the whole of the militant energies – revolutionary minorities structured in different ways and sometimes the so-called "partyless" as well, because their expression did not concern a precise organization and the different structures that came directly out of the struggle – which was rich with the memory accumulated during previous battles (such as 1848 which fed on

that of 1792-97,...) structured the struggle around the need to end the bourgeois war and to give a qualitative leap to the struggle against this world of private property and labor. When the Blanquist militants, the IWA, the Clubs or the “partyless” acted in the sense of affirming the struggle's needs against the directives of the Central Committee of the National Guard or of the Commune government then they were acting as the proletariat's party.

Struggles characteristically generate organizational structures, revolutionary minorities which after having learned lessons from past struggles are more capable of identifying the different traps of counter-revolution. The accumulated memory of generations of militants whose practice was clear about the dividing line between the classes, between revolutionary practice and the practice which is the work of counter-revolution, this memory is of crucial importance so that new social explosions do not run into the same pitfalls. This memory, when it is translated into positions turns past experience into a clear and intransigent guiding force. That is why revolutionary minorities which put this priority in the center of their activity are important. This priority for memory is not an activity turned towards the past but as fundamentals to be put forth in present and future struggles.

The proletariat's party in history could be summed up as the accumulated experience of the proletariat in history, whether concentrated in the form of memory or still in the memory of struggles and practices of rupture.

That doesn't turn it into an unreal being, some sort of lifeless metaphysical being without contradiction. On the contrary the historical party only exists in the different structures which the proletariat makes. These concretions are necessarily limited but are constantly seeing a qualitative leap allowing them to assure the victory of revolution.