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Karl Marx, [*First Address on the Franco-Prussian War*]⁷⁸

[...] In the *Inaugural Address* of the International Working Men's Association, of November 1864, we said – 'If the emancipation of the working classes requires their fraternal concurrence, how are they to fulfil that great mission with a foreign policy in pursuit of criminal designs, playing upon national prejudices, and squandering in piratical wars the people's blood and treasure?' We defined the foreign policy aimed at by the International in these words: 'Vindicate the simple laws of morals and justice, which ought to govern the relations of private individuals, as the laws paramount of the intercourse of nations.'

No wonder that Louis Bonaparte, who usurped power by exploiting the war of classes in France, and perpetuated it by periodical wars abroad, should, from the first, have treated the International as a dangerous foe. On the eve of the plebiscite⁷⁹ he ordered a raid on the members of the Administrative Committee of the International Working Men's Association throughout France, at Paris, Lyons, Rouen, Marseilles, Brest, etc., on the pretext that the International was a secret society dabbling in a *complot* for his assassination, a pretext soon after exposed in its full absurdity by his own judges. What was the real crime of the French branches of the International? They told the French people publicly and emphatically that voting the plebiscite was voting

⁷⁸ This is an excerpt from *First Address of the General Council of the International Working Men's Association on the Franco-Prussian War* written by Karl Marx (see note 1) between 19 July and 23 July 1870. Approved by the GC on July 26, it was published 2 days later in *The Pall-Mall Gazette*. The text was published in German, French and Russian during the month of August. The full version is in GC, IV: 323–9.

⁷⁹ Napoleon III's May 1870 referendum was worded to make it impossible to oppose Second Empire policies without opposing democratic reforms. The sections of the IWMA in France called for members to boycott the vote, leading to charges of conspiring against the Emperor.

despotism at home and war abroad. It has been, in fact, their work that in all the great towns, in all the industrial centres of France, the working class rose like one man to reject the plebiscite. Unfortunately, the balance was turned by the heavy ignorance of the rural districts. The stock exchanges, the cabinets, the ruling classes, and the press of Europe celebrated the plebiscite as a signal victory of the French emperor over the French working class; and it was the signal for the assassination, not of an individual, but of nations. [...]

Meanwhile, the Paris members of the International had again set to work. In the *Reveil* of 12 July, they published their manifesto 'to the Workmen of all Nations,' from which we extract the following few passages:

'Once more,' they say, 'on the pretext of European equilibrium, of national honor, the peace of the world is menaced by political ambitions. French, German, Spanish workmen! Let our voices unite in one cry of reprobation against war! 'War for a question of preponderance or a dynasty can, in the eyes of workmen, be nothing but a criminal absurdity. In answer to the warlike proclamations of those who exempt themselves from the blood tax, and find in public misfortunes a source of fresh speculations, we protest, we who want peace, labour, and liberty! 'Brothers in Germany! Our division would only result in the complete triumph of the despotism on both sides of the Rhine... Workmen of all countries! Whatever may for the present become of our common efforts, we, the members of the International Working Men's Association, who know of no frontiers, we send you, as a pledge of indissoluble solidarity, the good wishes and the salutations of the workmen of France.'

This manifesto of our Paris section was followed by numerous similar French addresses, of which we can here only quote the declaration of Neuilly-sur-Seine, published in the *Marseillaise* of 22 July:

'The war, is it just? No! The war, is it national? No! It is merely dynastic. In the name of humanity, or democracy, and the true interests of France, we adhere completely and energetically to the protestation of the International against the war.' [...]

Whatever may be the incidents of Louis Bonaparte's war with Prussia, the death-knell of the Second Empire has already sounded at Paris. It will end, as

it began, by a parody. But let us not forget that it is the governments and the ruling classes of Europe who enabled Louis Bonaparte to play during 18 years the ferocious farce of the Restored Empire.

On the German side, the war is a war of defence; but who put Germany to the necessity of defending herself? Who enabled Louis Bonaparte to wage war upon her? Prussia! It was Bismarck who conspired with that very same Louis Bonaparte for the purpose of crushing popular opposition at home, and annexing Germany to the Hohenzollern dynasty. [...]

If the German working class allows the present war to lose its strictly defensive character and to degenerate into a war against the French people, victory or defeat will prove alike disastrous. [...]

The principles of the International are, however, too widely spread and too firmly rooted amongst the German working class to apprehend such a sad consummation. The voices of the French workmen had re-echoed from Germany. A mass meeting of workmen, held at Brunswick on 16 July, expressed its full concurrence with the Paris manifesto, spurned the idea of national antagonism to France, and wound up its resolutions with these words:

‘We are the enemies of all wars, but above all of dynastic wars. ... With deep sorrow and grief we are forced to undergo a defensive war as an unavoidable evil; but we call, at the same time, upon the whole German working class to render the recurrence of such an immense social misfortune impossible by vindicating for the peoples themselves the power to decide on peace and war, and making them masters of their own destinies.’

At Chemnitz, a meeting of delegates, representing 50,000 Saxon workmen, adopted unanimously a resolution to this effect:

‘In the name of German Democracy, and especially of the workmen forming the Democratic Socialist Party, we declare the present war to be exclusively dynastic.... 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.’

The Berlin branch of the International has also replied to the Paris manifesto:

‘We,’ they say, ‘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.’

Be it so! [...]

The English working class stretch the hand of fellowship to the French and German working people. They feel deeply convinced that whatever turn the impending horrid war may take, the alliance of the working classes of all countries will ultimately kill war. The very fact that while official France and Germany are rushing into a fratricidal feud, the workmen of France and Germany send each other messages of peace and goodwill; this great fact, unparalleled in the history of the past, opens the vista of a brighter future. It proves that in contrast to old society, with its economical miseries and its political delirium, a new society is springing up, whose International rule will be *Peace*, because its national ruler will be everywhere the same – Labour! The pioneer of that new society is the International Working Men’s Association.