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The Political Nature of the Paris Commune of 1871 and Manifestations of Marxist Ideology in the Official Publications of the Central Committee

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The Political Nature of the Paris Commune of 1871
and Manifestations of Marxist Ideology in the Official Publications
of the Central Committee

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at
Virginia Commonwealth University

by

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Introduction: The Paris Commune, Historiography, Methodology, and Sources.....	1
Chapter I: The Political Nature of the Commune as Expressed in the Posters, Flyers, and Newspaper Articles Published by the Central Committee.....	21
Chapter II: Manifestations of Marxist Rhetoric and Ideology in the <i>Journal Officiel</i>	56
Conclusion.....	92
Bibliography.....	97

Abstract

THE POLITICAL NATURE OF THE PARIS COMMUNE OF 1871 AND MANIFESTATIONS OF MARXIST IDEOLOGY IN THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE

By Emily Marshall Jones, BA.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2018.

Major Director: Joseph W. Bendersky, Ph.D., Department of History

Historians originally claimed that the 1871 Paris Commune was inspired by Karl Marx. Since the 1960s, however, this assertion has been rejected by scholars who either claim that Marx had no influence over the Paris Communards or do not address the possibility that this influence existed. Many scholars have also claimed that the Commune was not political in any way, but was a rebellion inspired by patriotism, bitterness for the Versailles government's capitulation of Paris to Prussia, or a spontaneous reaction to hostility from the national army's attempt to disarm the indignant, rapidly organizing Parisian workers who called for municipal authority under their own socialist government. This thesis analyzes the official publications of the governing body of the Paris Commune and argues that these sources demonstrate that this movement was political in nature, and that Marxist ideology helped to shape the political minds of the revolutionary working class in Paris.

Introduction: The Paris Commune, Historiography, Methodology, and Sources

I. The History of the Commune

The 1871 Paris Commune, which began during the defeat of the French Empire of Napoleon III in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871), was the culmination of decades of tension between the French monarchist government and organized labor syndicates. The First International Workingmen's Association, whose French members were imbued with inspiration from leading French leftists such as Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Auguste Blanqui led the insurrection against the newly proclaimed republican government of President Adolph Thiers. After brief independence, the Paris Commune ended with the "Bloody Week" of May 21st to May 28th, which brought the indiscriminate massacre of Parisian civilians.

The events that sparked the establishment of the Paris Commune began early in the morning on March 18th, 1871. In the wake of defeat by the Prussian armies, the conservative provisional government, headed by Thiers had negotiated peace by allowing Prussian troops to occupy sections of Paris, among other concessions.¹ The Parisians who called for socialist self-rule in their city, aware that Thiers' supporters were monarchists who threatened their freedom with or without the presence of the Prussian occupiers, became restless and demanded their municipal autonomy, forcing Thiers and his government to flee to Versailles. The Parisian National Guard, which was composed mostly of former laborers, had been allowed to form a governing Central Committee in Paris that would command its units. After Thiers' and the National Assembly's months of censorship, steep demands on the working classes, and a threat to disband the Central Committee, agitation in Paris motivated Thiers to disarm the National

¹ Robert Tombs, *The Paris Commune, 1871* (London: Pearson Education, 1999), 1.

Guard. Aware that the National Guard, which was comprised mostly of workers who had lost their livelihoods during the Prussian War and the Siege of Paris in September 1870, had affiliations with leftist organizations, Thiers recognized the threat of an armed force in Paris that opposed the conservative government. His attempts to extract canons that the National Guard had funded was met at first with women throwing stones and badgering the troops, but ended in riots that left Thiers and his men retreating to Versailles.² In the process, Thiers had ordered his military to use force against the National Guardsmen, but most refused to fire on their brothers in arms. Paris had become a barricaded city and the Versailles army had been crippled by the strength of Paris' National Guard.

This working class of Paris, which had been inculcated with the doctrines of Proudhon and Blanqui, counted among them many members of the First International Workingmen's Association and had previously voiced a desire for socialist revolution. As a leading figure in the International, Marx had advised Paris not to seek revolution, but to use the period during the provisional republic to form strong working-class organizations that could one day achieve revolution. Marx's counsel fell on deaf ears of those who had survived the Siege of 1870 only to find starvation, harsh financial demands, and the threat of a monarchist-majority government that threatened the republican ideals they had fought so hard to secure. These Parisians saw Thiers' bourgeois policies as a vehicle to keep the working classes politically subdued, and the immediate seizure of municipal authority in Paris seemed the only way to improve their situation.

In the tumultuous two months that followed the barricading of Paris on March 18th, the Commune introduced popular social reforms, but also caused discord and destruction within the

² Ibid., 1-3.

city. As a military organization, the Central Committee, was eager to hand over authority of the Commune by calling for elections. The newly elected members of the Central Committee were workers, not experienced politicians, who found themselves unprepared to govern a city while defending it from both the French regular military and the Prussian armies. The Commune lasted seventy-two days, until it finally fell to Thiers's troops on May 28th, after the "Bloody Week" that cost 20,000 Parisians their lives. When the Versailles troops finally breached the city walls, men, women, and children were massacred indiscriminately. There were very few attempts to take prisoners or to ascertain which Parisians had even supported the Commune. Most members of the National Guard were either killed on the streets or lined up and shot in Père Lachaise Cemetery, but a number of them were swiftly court-marshaled and executed in the days following the massacre. As an act of defiance, Parisians set fire to those buildings they believed represented monarchial and religious power. The Louvre, the Palais Royale, the Tuileries, and Notre Dame were among these. Most of the buildings survived, but the Hôtel de Ville, which served as the headquarters for the Central Committee was burned to the ground to prevent its seizure along with the Tuileries.³ Those who had survived the Bloody Week were subjected to years of trials which sentenced to death, exile, and imprisonment anyone who had participated in the Commune.⁴ In 1878, pardons were given to those who had been convicted of various crimes in the name of the Commune, but it was not until 1880 that total amnesty was granted to most of the ex-communards. Those who lived to see their amnesty realized were mostly those living in exile in New Caledonia.

³ Ibid., 11.

⁴ Ibid., 11-12.

II. Historiography of the Commune

Karl Marx was one of the first scholars to write on the subject of the Commune in his pamphlet titled “The Civil War in France.” His writings were followed by many histories written in England and America that villainized the Communards and laid blame for the insurrection on Marx’s influence. Accounts such as those written by William Pembroke Fetridge⁵ and Thomas March⁶ exemplify the literature that condemned both the Communards and their Marxist influence. In subsequent historiography, many scholars, such as Eugene Schulkind⁷ and Donny Gluckstein,⁸ took a different view of the Communards, celebrating both their courage and their principles. These historians, though, do not identify the possibility that the Commune was a movement influenced by Marx’s writings. These historians tended to be sympathetic to the Commune cause; some were, in fact, Marxists themselves. The authors of more recent literature on the Paris Commune have either avoided this longstanding controversy by focusing their research on areas such as logistics of the insurrection⁹ and memorialization of the “Bloody Week,”¹⁰ or have chosen to take a positive stance on aspects such as the progressive positions taken by the Central Committee on issues such as women’s roles in society¹¹ and the sagacity

⁵ William Pembroke Fetridge, *The rise and fall of the Paris commune in 1871; with a full account of the bombardment, capture, and burning of the city. Illustrated with a map of Paris and portraits from original photographs* (New York: Harper, 1871).

⁶ Thomas March, *The history of the Paris Commune of 1871* (London: S. Sonnenschein & co., 1896).

⁷ Eugene Schulkind, ed., *The Paris Commune of 1871: The View from the Left* (New York: Grove Press, 1974).

⁸ Gluckstein, *The Paris Commune*.

⁹ Roger V. Gould, “Multiple Networks and Mobilization in the Paris Commune, 1871.” *American Sociological Review* 56, no. 6 (1991): 716-729.

¹⁰ Janice Best. “Une Statue monumentale de la Republique.” *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 34, no. 3 (2006): 303-322.

¹¹ Carolyn J. Eichner. *Surmounting the Barricades: Women in the Paris Commune* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2004).

that the Central Committee was able to demonstrate by attempting to disassociate the Commune with previous violent revolutions.¹²

The first historical narrative written about the Commune was Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray's *History of the Commune of 1871*. As a participator in the Commune and a Communard himself, he paints a biased portrait of the Communard, his ideals, and actions. Lissagaray, with Marx's help, collected the testimonies of those who had been involved in the insurgence from his exile in London, where he was staying in the Marxs' home. The work was translated to English by Marx's daughter, Eleanor, later briefly be engaged to Lissagaray. This first history of the Commune opens with a preface stating the author's intention to write a complete history while the participants survive. He denies any participation in the Commune, describing himself merely as an exile who "...for five years has sifted the evidence; who has not ventured upon a single assertion without accumulated proofs; who sees the victor on the look-out for the slightest inaccuracy to deny all the rest; who knows no better plea for the vanquished than the simple and sincere recital of their history."¹³

Lissagaray's recital of this history falls short of simple or unbiased. The account begins in 1870 with the realization that France is falling to the Prussian armies. Lissagaray introduces the immediate causes of resentment felt by Parisians, whose city had been surrendered to Prussia by President Thiers, against the outcries of Parisians for self-defense. Throughout this work, Lissagaray describes the sights and sounds of the Commune in vivid detail that he experienced himself. Lissagaray's vibrant language and poorly-veiled sympathies are expressed throughout,

¹² Dominica Chang, "Un Nouveau '93': Discourses of Mimicry and Terror in the Paris Commune of 1871." *French Historical Studies* 36, no. 4 (2013): 629-648.

¹³ Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray, Preface to *History of the Commune of 1871* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967).

but one line describing the fall of a leader of the Communards best reveals his adherence to Marxist ideology: “The Mount of Martyrs has no more glorious one than Varlin. May he too be enshrined in the great heart of the working class!”¹⁴ In this passage, Lissagaray has mimicked a passage from Karl Marx’s *The Civil War in France, 1871*. In this address, Marx states, “Working men’s Paris, with its Commune, will be for ever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society. Its martyrs are enshrined in the great heart of the working class.”¹⁵ Lissagaray concludes with a narrative of the massacres of the Communards and the processes of exiling and imprisoning those who survived. Lissagaray’s details, however, are teeming with flourishes, excessive imagery, and marked biases. The works that he presents as a mere “recital” of history is infused with his socialist and Marxist sympathies. By the last sentence, the author’s aim to present a history that is “simple” has given way to his ultimate goal of glorifying the Communards and their cause: “Let the Socialist party attest its principle of international solidarity and its power by saving those who have fallen for it.”¹⁶ The language that Lissagaray employs superimposed Marx’s ideas upon those who had led the Commune. Despite the propagandizing nature of the work, his meticulous research and his own experience in the Commune provide a valuable source that has been cited by nearly every subsequent historian of the Paris Commune. His superimposition of Marx’s theories on those of the Communards, along with the earliest historians’ and journalists’ assertion that the Commune was a Marxist movement persisted through the 1920s. After this period, very little was published on the topic of the Commune at all.

¹⁴ Ibid., 387.

¹⁵ Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France* (New York: International Publishers, 1940), 81.

¹⁶ Lissagaray, *History of the Commune of 1871*, 465.

It was not until the 1960s that historians took a new approach to the study of the Commune and began to dispute the long-held belief that Marx was responsible for the ideas that sparked this revolution. In the analyses of these authors, a trend appears: rather than pinpointing any one particular ideology or set of ideological influences, they embrace the complexity of the decades of ideological influences and the factionalized nature of French socialists in the 1870s. Not only do they present the Communards as a loosely-associated group of socialists with divergent doctrines, but they question whether it was truly these Parisians' socialist principles that were the actual impetus behind the outbreak of the Commune.

It seems curious that every major historical work addressing the Paris Commune discusses—often at great length—the role that the First International Workingmen's Association played in the formation of ideas and practices of the Communards, without addressing the role that Marx played in the founding the International. In contrast, every historian who has studied on Marx or the rise of Marxism *has* addressed Marx's role in founding the International. This discrepancy may be attributed to the fact that it would be extremely difficult to prove that the Communards who participated in the French branch of the International were Marxists or even casual followers of his ideas. By the time of the outbreak of the Commune, the International was splintered into factions: those who followed Marx's ideas, those who more closely aligned themselves with Proudhon, and those who supported the influential Russian anarchist, Mikhail Bakunin. That a particular Communard was both a member of the International and a follower of Proudhon can be clearly demonstrated, because many of the Communards openly supported his ideas in writing. It is much more difficult to pin the label of "Marxism" to Communards, because there is very little written evidence of this and no use of the terms "Marxism" or "communism" in the relevant extant documentation.

Historian Eugene Gogol emphasized the significant part that Marxist ideology played in founding and formation the International: “At the same time, the eight years (1864-1872) of the Workingmen’s Association existence on the Europe continent were decisively shaped by Marx’s intellectual/organizational participation.”¹⁷ It seems undeniable that Marx, then, influenced the French socialists through his participation and leadership in the International, so it is surprising that this possibility is never considered. Marx is, however, discussed in every study of the Commune, but only regarding his interpretations of the Commune’s efforts and his passive support for the cause. There is no doubt that the Commune played a pivotal role in Marx’s intellectual development and inspired a generation of French Marxists who became a leading force in the International after 1871, but why do historians discuss this relationship between Marx and the Commune at such great length without mentioning the possibility (or, occasionally, dismissing the possibility) that Marx played a hand in its inception? It seems that the link between Marx and the Commune must be either an invention of the earliest historians that accredited the revolution to Marx, or there is a more direct relationship that is not easily identified and documented.

In 1960, Eugene W. Schulkind published an article in *French Historical Studies*, discussing the activity of popular organizations in France before and during the Commune and the larger political environment that led to the uprising. Very critical of studies that rely too heavily on the actions, speeches, and publications of the Commune’s leaders and participants, he argues that the activity of popular organizations reveals more about the political and social character of the Commune than these elite manifestations. He states that, “It would be inaccurate,

¹⁷ Eugene Gogol, *Toward a Dialectic of Philosophy and Organization* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninkljkje Bill NV, 2012), 60.

however, for a discussion of their [popular organizations'] aims to loosely apply specific labels such as Utopian, Proudhonist, Marxist, or Blanquist. The short duration of the Commune in itself limited the development of such specific ideologies that might have occurred among large numbers of Communards."¹⁸ While Schulkind is correct that there was no cohesive ideology that could be clearly identified in the writings and activities of the Commune, he does not address the intellectual influences behind the organizations that supported the Commune that were developing in the decades leading up to its outbreak. He divides the population of the Commune into two groups: the "radicals" and the "moderates." His research focuses mainly on unions, rather than ideological associations. These unions focused mainly on improving their members' working conditions, specific to their trade and, though many of these workers participated in political organizations, they were more often drawn to the International. His discussion of the International highlights both radicalism, and a lack of uniformity of thought. This would be expected because the International was so diverse. But the International was not only an amalgamation of radical trade unionists. Many French socialists with strong ties and allegiances to Proudhonism, Blanquism, and possibly Marxism also participated in the International, though their associations were less likely to hold public meetings with recorded minutes, which is the source of most of Schulkind's primary documents. These groups of economists and philosophers are largely overlooked in Schulkind's article. He lists the five primary concerns of moderate groups of French socialists: the "treasonable" capitulation to Prussia, the threat to a republican form of government posed by the pro-monarchist assembly elected on February 8, the immediate payment of obligations contracted during the siege, the continued power of the Church,

¹⁸ Eugene Schulkind, "The Activity of Popular Organizations during the Paris Commune of 1871," *French Historical Studies* Vol. 1, no. 4 (Autumn 1960): 407.

especially in education, and the absence of self-government in Paris. He also states that “there is seldom any mention of social questions by these moderate forces,” but fails to provide an identification for these “moderates,” besides “several Masonic lodges.”¹⁹ This article conveys an image of the Commune as a haphazard amalgamation of moderate socialists, and radical socialists without any developed ideology among their groups, seeking only a vaguely conceptualized workers’ government. Though it is clear that the Commune had no coherent ideology, Schulkind overlooks all philosophical and economic influences that had inspired the Communards, and disregards many of the popular organizations and associations that might have promoted these ideologically inspired aspirations. It is significant, however, that he recognizes the possibility that Marxism could be an influential force in the French mindset, while other historians have recognized only Proudhon, Blanqui, and Jacobinism; though he does not believe that these influences were the cause of the revolution.

In 1974, Schulkind published a collection of socialist writings that dealt with the topic of the Commune, titled *The Paris Commune of 1871: The View From the Left*. The compilation contains documents written by French socialists both before and after the Commune. The earlier documents were included, because they express the call for socialist revolution in France and the ideas that were common among those who participated in the Commune. Schulkind also included writings that were published by the Central Committee, organizations that participated in political life during the Commune, and outside sources interested in its success. The views of those inspired by the Commune are also included, such as those of Lenin and Trotsky. This collection of papers presents a narrative of the state of mind of European socialists as their views were developing before the Commune, the beliefs of socialists expressed within the Commune

¹⁹ Ibid., 407.

itself, and the later interpretations of this event from the left. But this collection, like his earlier work, does not address the philosophical influences of the Communards. The excerpts that he chose were materials relevant to any examination of the Commune, but are not representative of the entirety of the publications of the Central Committee, and exclude the posters, flyers, and newspaper articles that address the political and social ambitions of the Commune. Subsequent historians often cite Schulkind's work, and his interpretation of the Commune as a disorganized group of revolutionaries fighting for autonomy without adhering to a political ideology persists in contemporary examinations of the Commune.

Analyses of the complexity of the Commune's political motivations seemed to be less appealing to the following generation of historians writing between the 1990s and the early 21st century, because, as Kristin Ross states, this was "the last period of high visibility of the Commune, the 1960s and '70s."²⁰ During this period, any question that Marx may have influenced the Communard mind was dismissed as a myth, and with it, all attempts to identify Marxist ideology in the writings and actions of the Commune. Recent studies of the Commune, too, overlook the possibility that Marx's influence may have been present in the Commune. As historians continue to contribute to the debate over whether the Commune was truly a manifestation of socialist initiative, they still do not revisit the belief that Marx had inspired (or helped to inspire) the event that was so pervasive in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. When this topic is mentioned, it is usually an aside and not discussed at length.

The subject of the role of popular organizations in the Paris Commune was revisited by Martin Phillip Johnson's 1996 book, *The Paradise of Association: Political Culture and Popular*

²⁰ Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune* (London: Verso, 2015), 2.

Organizations in the Paris Commune of 1871. His in-depth study of popular organizations, and the political culture that they fostered focuses on the intellectual, as well as the economic factors that contributed to the call for a Commune in Paris. He studies the culture, politics, and structures of a diverse range of socialist and unionist clubs and organizations. His work focuses on the way that associations and clubs formed in the 1870s and how these groups were the basic unit of socialist society in Paris. Rather than presenting these diverse groups as discordant, he emphasizes how these units functioned together in an attempt to achieve common goals of republicanism and ownership of means of production. Johnson makes no mention of Marx's influence on the shaping of the French socialist mind before 1871, though he addresses Marx's interpretations of the Commune and how the revolution shaped his own ideology.

Rupert Christiansen, in his study, *Paris Babylon: The Story of the Paris Commune*, examines the questions of the motivations behind the Paris Commune's establishment, but continues in a trend that depicts the Commune as lacking organization, clear intentions, and political motives. The book lacks a central thesis, and aims, instead, to depict the character of Paris during the Commune. Christiansen does not analyze the chief documents, nor does he seek to understand the complex ideological developments that contributed to the short-lived revolution. The book is primarily composed of biographies, personal accounts from Paris in the 1870's, and generalized statements about Parisians' inability to organize efficiently (or their disinterest in organization). While previous authors had attempted to broach the issue of complexity (and sometimes disorganization) within the Commune, Christiansen seeks to simplify the topic by merely stating that the Commune was so disorganized that attempts to comprehend its intricacies are futile. Christiansen does, however, provide a simplistic classification of the ideological associations of those elected to the Central Committee. In this

long list, he states that, “only two had any knowledge of Karl Marx.”²¹ Though he does not provide the names of these two members, it can be assumed that he refers to Leo Frankel and Eugène Varlin, who were in correspondence with Marx. His dismissal of Marx’s possible influence on the members of the Commune does not take into account two important factors: that the two members that he is probably referencing were two of the most influential members of both the International and the Central Committee, and that it is highly unlikely that Frankel and Varlin kept Marx’s ideas to themselves.

In the *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune*, Roger V. Gould argues strongly that the Paris Commune was not even a truly socialist revolution. Contrasting the Communards of 1871 with those who fought in the Revolution of 1848, he points out a lack of demand for the “right to work” in 1871 that had been a central theme in 1848. He also attributes all the problems faced by the Communards to the impact of the Franco-Prussian War. His argument is divided into three parts: “...these two Parisian revolutions began differently, ended differently, and were understood by their protagonists as thoroughly different kinds of struggles...”²² Indeed, he asserts that the Paris Commune was not driven by political objectives at all. He states that, “at no point in this book will I claim to offer a comprehensive interpretation of something like *the* doctrine underlying the Commune or the Revolution of 1848.”²³ Instead, he offers a stance that is based solely on comparisons and secondary literature, without any examination of literature produced during the Commune. It is possible that he does not consider the Commune to be politically-motivated,

²¹ Rupert Christiansen, *Paris Babylon: The Story of the Paris Commune* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 298.

²² Roger V. Gould, *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 7.

²³ *Ibid.*, 13.

because he does not examine the political influences on the Communards, or how socialist principles were manifested in 1871. It is undeniable that there was no one doctrine underlying the Commune, as he has claimed, but his work disregards political motives only because they are not as clearly-articulated as they were in 1848.

In 2006, Donny Gluckstein published *The Paris Commune: A Revolution in Democracy*. Since Gluckstein's ties to Marxism are apparent throughout his work, it is surprising that he, too, overlooks the possibility that the Communards had been affected by Marx's influence in the International. He cites Marx's writing more than any other historian of the Commune, and draws parallels between contemporary and 19th century Marxism. He states that there are only three political influences on the Communards: Proudhon, Blanqui, and Jacobinism. However, his approach to the subject of motivations behind the revolution, differs from his colleagues': he writes that it was the desire for equality and representation alone that served as the impetus for the Parisian uprising. He does not attempt to address former historians' assertions that the Communards may have been reacting to Thiers' capitulation of Paris or that the Commune was a spontaneous act of rebellion.

III. Methodology and Sources

While Marx initially opposed the idea of French laborers initiating a social revolution, claiming that the organizations lacked the infrastructure for a successful government, his writings immediately after the fall of the Commune commended the efforts of the Communards and claimed them as his disciples. Historians such as Roger L. Williams have recognized the connections between Paris Commune and Marxist ideology.²⁴ Many first-hand accounts also

²⁴ Roger L. Williams, *The Commune of Paris, 1871* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1969).

express an association with the First Workingmen's International, such as that written by Lissagaray²⁵. Most historians, however, acknowledge that multiple political factors and factions contributed to the foundation of the Commune, and those that do, emphasize the role of socialism do not adequately address the influence that Marx levied on the Communards through his leadership in the International. Moreover, the literature issued during the three-month period of the Commune did not explicitly express pure Marxist concepts. Many ideas circulated by the Central Committee diverge from and, at times, conflict with Marx's own writings, in favor of those of Proudhon, and even those Jacobin beliefs promoted by Blanqui. Though popular Marxist jargon and concepts are ubiquitous in these circulations, their failure to adhere to Marx's or any other specific doctrine could be indicative of an important aspect of the Communards' objectives: that most of these radicals had been attempting to establish a social revolution without any unifying political theory or goals for social reforms, and that a new simplified, wide-ranging, inclusive brand of socialism needed to be created and promoted to appease the divided, or less informed, revolutionaries in Paris.

The first chapter of this thesis examines the political nature of the Commune and the ideological associations of its leaders. Historians have pointed to many divergent causes for the outbreak of the Commune, and the prevailing current trend among these historians is to claim that the revolution was not caused as much by political ambition as by nationalism, pride, or reactions to perceived hostility from Versailles. Such historians have claimed that the Commune was apolitical in nature. Thus, it could not be deemed a socialist government at all, as earlier

²⁵ Lissagaray, *History of the Commune of 1871*. It is significant that Lissagaray was a friend of Karl Marx and resided with the Marx family during his exile. His account, the most cited first-hand account of the Paris Commune, was approved by Marx himself.

historians—and the Communards themselves—claimed. However, based upon newly examined evidence, my research challenges these interpretations.

The most substantial source material analyzed, are the posters, pamphlets, and newspaper articles published by the Central Committee of the Commune. The Central Committee were prolific publishers, relying on the circulation of their posters, pamphlets and articles to garner support for their cause, request assistance from its supporters both inside Paris and in other French cities, and to maintain momentum in their struggle against the Versailles army. These sources can be found through several institutions, but the largest collection of flyers is owned by the Bibliothèque nationale de France. Copies of substantial numbers of these publications are available through their website. Many pamphlets and other various publications can also be found in published collections, such as *The Paris Commune of 1871: The View from the Left* by Eugene Schulkind.

The second chapter analyzes the basic tenets of Marxism relevant to the French working class and the Paris Commune, as expressed in Marx's own writings and the literature published by the Commune. These sources are often brief, but contain reiterations of common jargon used by Marxist devotees and express common goals held by the Communards. My historiographical survey of existing research has discovered no source that has focused solely on the study of pamphlets and posters distributed during the Paris Commune. Though this thesis does not aim to settle the debate of the role that Marxism played in 1871, it will contribute an important empirically based examination to the scholarly conversation by analyzing these publications.

The Central Committee of the Paris Commune had several means of communication with its public, but the primary form of communication was the newspaper, the *Journal Officiel de la Commune*. This publication was released twice daily between Sunday, March 19th and

Wednesday, May 24th—the entirety of the Commune’s existence. The morning edition was the primary source of communication by the Central Committee, while the shorter evening editions were printed to keep Parisians apprised to any developments that may have occurred during the day. This newspaper was one of nearly a dozen periodicals printed during the Commune. Others, such as *l’Action*, edited by Lissagaray, and *Le Bonnet Rouge*, were printed by independent individuals or organizations, but the *Journal Officiel* was the only publication endorsed by the governing bodies of the Commune. The journal was divided into two sections: first, the *Partie Officielle*, and secondly, the *Partie Non Officielle*. In the *Partie Officiel*, administrative matters were addressed, such as upcoming elections, announcements of election results, updates about the state of communication and travel, and proclamations of changes in policies and laws. The *Partie Non Officielle* contained more charged information about the state of affairs in Paris and in France. There were several declarations and manifestos printed to restate and reinforce the beliefs and intentions of the Commune’s leaders. These statements were often vague and asserted a common belief in France’s democratic system, patriotic sentiments, and a faith in a general form of socialism. This section also contained articles written by members of socialist groups in Paris, such as political organizations and trade unions. These articles were typically more specific when addressing political ambitions.

The lack of cohesive ideology may indicate that socialist literature and principles, though popular among the labor class that governed the Commune, was largely misunderstood by the masses or that they simply could not concur on their political aims. In the hope of creating a unified front against Thiers’ rule and the oppressive forces of what they perceived as a bourgeois-dominated economy, the Parisian socialists needed to create a brand of socialism

acceptable to the factionalized, and often incompatible, associations and unions that tended to orbit around the ideas of one intellectual leaders and inspirations.

The first possibility, that a generic and universally-acceptable form of socialism needed to be created to unite the diverse working-class associations of Paris, necessitates the exploration of a second: that Marx's ideology may have been overlooked in the examination of material published by the Commune. Though contemporary scholars do not address this possibility, the first histories of the Commune asserted that Marx had absolutely influenced this movement. There has yet to be any study that has produced substantial evidence to contradict these earliest historians of the Commune. In this case, the ideas which were adopted from Marx's writings and ubiquitously circulated in print could be obscured by generic messages of socialist thought and blended with the doctrines of other leading socialist thinkers in France. Though some of Marx's recognizable concepts were common in Communard literature, many distinctly Marxist beliefs, which were likely to be supported by members of the Central Committee, were suppressed in order to unify the divergent socialist masses and their disparate leadership. Socialism needed to be stripped to its most essential form in order to achieve this popular ideology. As Donny Gluckstein writes, "Since an agreed statement was needed it was voted through, but all groups found it disappointing, and it was the lowest common denominator."²⁶

The Commune was undoubtedly a time of great confusion and its mission was vague. Historians have claimed that it was planned, while others claim that it was spontaneous. The insurrection has been depicted as both a strategized political move to promote a popular cry for socialism and as an act of unpremeditated self-defense and nationalism. The act of examining the

²⁶ Donny Gluckstein, *The Paris Commune: A Revolution in Democracy* (London: Bookmarks Publications, 2006), 181.

secondary literature on the Commune cannot absolutely provide any clarification of the political nature of the Commune, because these assertions are contradictory, and all of them may be correct in some respect. It is impossible to pinpoint an exact political ideology, or even a primary aim of the Communards because, as Donny Gluckstein writes, "... the communards did not help clarify the issue because they left no single document summing up their aims."²⁷ It is, however, possible to gain a sense of the priorities held by the majority and the leadership of the Commune and an understanding of the ideological foundations that motivated the insurrectionists by closely analyzing the documents that the Communards did leave behind. The official communications of the Central Committee, through posters, pamphlets, and newspaper articles can provide insight into which matters were deemed most urgent. From these documents, it can be possible to piece together a narrative of disparate camps of political thought converging to achieve a commonly desirable end. The posters, flyers, and particularly the newspaper articles produced by the Central Committee do reveal the political nature of the Commune, and the influence of Marx's principles are present in these documents through both Marxist rhetoric and ideology.

Out of evidentiary necessity, my examination of these sources includes lengthy quotes preceded or followed by critical analyses of their relevance to the issues under discussion. Such lengthy quotes, together with the more numerous citations of documents, demonstrate the representative nature of the political and ideological concepts and positions within these sources. Such lengthy quotes also show that the aspects of these sources related to my argumentation are not taken out of context. Moreover, since Marx *per se* is never explicitly mentioned in any of this documentation, such quotes are required to establish that these sources are, in fact, reflections of

²⁷ Ibid., 181.

his ideas. An exegesis of the full quotes allows for more thorough demonstrations of such manifestations of Marxist influence, thereby establishing that the ideas and political positions expressed by the Central Committee were significantly influenced by him. Indeed, only by also directly exposing the reader to these ideas expressed in their original form and language can the tone, attitudes, and nuances of the political positions and atmosphere of that period be fully appreciated.

Chapter I: The Political Nature of the Commune as Expressed in the Posters, Flyers, and Newspaper Articles Published by the Central Committee

The Commune was undoubtedly a time of great confusion and the political aims of the Communards were vague. Some historians have claimed that it was a planned revolt, while others claim that it was spontaneous. The insurrection has been depicted as both a strategized political movement to promote a popular cry for socialism and democracy and as an act of unpremeditated self-defense and nationalism. The current examination of the posters, pamphlets, and newspapers articles published by the Commune's leaders, as well as that of the actions of political associations and unions, attempts to illuminate our understanding of these contradictory contentions. The years leading up to the establishment of the Commune, particularly the months following the 1870 Siege of Paris, demonstrate the immense popular cry for establishment of a commune, and the long-held intention of Parisian leftists to seize an opportunity to begin their long-awaited revolution.

Though several authorities on the Commune, such as Roger V. Gould, Georges Laronze and David Thomson, assert that it may have been a movement inspired more by a spontaneous act of patriotism than by political motivation, it cannot be denied that politics played a pivotal role in the insurgence and the governing of the Commune²⁸. Rupert Christiansen suggested that it may not have even been patriotism that spurred the French socialists to revolt, but humiliation after their efforts for self-rule had been rejected, Baron Haussmann redesigned their city and disrupted their lives, and after Thiers' surrender of the capital to Prussia. In Paris Babylon: The

²⁸ Gould, *Insurgent Identities*; Georges Laronze, *Histoire de la Commune* (Paris: Payot, 1928); David Thomson, *Democracy in France since 1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

Story of the Paris Commune, he writes, “The Commune was more a furious instinctive response to this trail of humiliation than it was a calculated or conspiratorial political strategy. In this respect, it is futile to look too deep for the ‘causes’ of the Commune—it simply had to happen, like so much in history, for reasons beyond reason.”²⁹ This argument borders on deterministic and rejects any possibility that the Commune’s organization was anything more than “a noisy multifariousness and confusion, and a hostile resilience to all attempts to placate or silence them.”³⁰ The political associations that governed and thrived during the Commune were many, diverse, and often seemingly incompatible. These groups, though all socialist and centered around the working class, shared many of the same frustrations, but differed in their proposed solutions to the social issues of the 1870’s. Because these groups were fractured into multitudes of clubs and associations, revolution seemed improbable, as each political unit would be too small to overcome the Thiers’ national military stationed at Versailles.

Gould’s claim that the Paris Commune was apolitical and spontaneous has several weak points. The first notable point is that the Paris Commune of 1871 was not the first attempt made by socialists in France to establish a Commune. They had, on October 31st, 1870, attempted a similar uprising in Paris led by the heads of major socialist groups, specifically Auguste Blanqui and Felix Pyat. These Parisians marched on city hall and demanded a commune that allowed Parisians to rule themselves. Since the Prussian Siege in September, 1870, Paris’ status as the capital of France was shifting. Workers’ unrest and organization threatened Thiers’ Second Republic, so he had moved some administrative bodies outside of the city. There were several other cities who were granted their own municipal authority at the time, but Thiers viewed

²⁹ Christiansen, *Paris Babylon*, 296.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 399.

Paris's high volume of radicals and revolutionaries to be too threatening to grant this leeway to Paris. Kristin Ross has dated the demand for a Parisian commune to early 1869, when socialist club would shout "vive la Commune!" during their meetings.³¹ Smaller skirmishes led by socialist thinkers and revolutionaries recurred between 1848 and 1871, and it is clear that revolution was on the minds of all socialists in France at the time, though none of their previous attempts had been successful. The demand for the immediate establishment of the Commune began in early 1871. On January 7th, the Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements, which was comprised mostly of International members, members of radical clubs, and critics of the government in September 1870, published the "Red Poster," which stated: "The policy, strategy, administration of the Government of September 4, a mere continuation of the Empire, are condemned. Make way for the people! Make way for the Commune!"³²

Though the Parisian socialists had been calling for a communal government for at least a year, Gould claims that the establishment of the Commune was set in motion by the Parisians' reaction to the seizure of their cannons on March 18th. This argument would imply that the Commune may never have commenced had this event not taken place when it did. This argument also disregards the reality that Thiers' troops were seizing the cannons to prevent the imminent insurrection that way already underway. The impending nature of the establishment of the Commune is evident in a letter written by Eugène Varlin to Pierre Lavrov one week before the outbreak of the Commune. In it he writes, "one more week and we will be masters of seventeen

³¹ Ross, *Communal Luxury*, 19.

³² Schulkind, "The Activity of Popular Organizations," 396.

of twenty arrondissements, then we will chase the prefecture of police from Paris, we will overthrow the government, and France will follow us.”³³

Other historians have pointed to the fact that other “communes” that French municipalities had tried to establish in the past had only the goal of civic autonomy in mind. Even Parisians had attempted to form a commune in the years leading up to 1871, but their primary goal was to govern their own city without federal intervention. These initiatives, though launched by workers, did not usually demand workers’ rights at the level that the 1871 Communards did. They had wished for more freedom from the power of the bourgeoisie, but they did not, until 1870, attempt to create a socialist form of government. Even in 1870, workers indicated their desire for liberation from what they felt was an unfair class system by means of self-rule, but they did not expect to establish a social democracy. But by early 1871, the clubs and organizations in Paris that centered around socialist thought had grown so large in number and the call for a social republic was so omnipresent that a revolution seemed impending. Though workers had attempted many times to spark social emancipation from the bourgeoisie by means of elections, by 1871 it became clear to the workers of Paris that this method was not efficacious. This led to a loss of faith in the entire Second Republic under Thiers, due, in large part, to the growth of the Paris branch of the International. 1871 saw a change in definition of a “commune” from a small, local governing system that would defend its people to a form of rule that would bring about social and economic change.³⁴ The Communards of Paris adopted and adapted this form of government for their own socialist purposes.

³³ Michel Cordillot, *Eugène Varlin: Chronique d’un espoir assassiné* (Paris: Éditions ouvrières, 1991), 207.

³⁴ Schulkind, “The Activity of Popular Organizations,” 398.

Following the outrage after the socialists' losses in the February elections, Parisian socialists began to organize themselves in a new way: rather than following the trajectory of splintering into ever-more polarized ideological factions, several groups sought unification. The future Communards formed a Revolutionary Socialist Party to represent the interests of the working class in the elections, but after their defeat, this party began to merge with the Parisian National Guard.³⁵ The amalgamation of these party shows the Parisian socialists' growing interest in disregarding political divisions, creating an all-inclusive brand of socialism, and exploiting this cooperation to gain more political influence.

When analyzing the documents published by the elected officials of the Commune, it is extremely difficult to identify any unifying ideology. It is for this reason that others studying the Communards have asserted that the insurrection was not a political revolution, but an act of patriotic rebellion. The sources do, in fact, contain more statements of love for France, liberty, and their republic than openly political critiques of Thiers' government. These scholars, however, fail to consider that the primary goal of the Communards was to re-establish a republic and that this fact alone qualifies their mission as political. The Commune was also the manifestation of a political war that had existed between social classes in the French government and, as Marx states in his *Communist Manifesto*, "...every class struggle is a political struggle."³⁶ Their other goals were secondary to the establishment of this republic, but those goals were also political in nature, and were most often specifically socialist. The Communards were aware of their divisions and knew that their only chance of success relied on their ability to cooperate. On

³⁵ Martin Phillip Johnson, *The Paradise of Association: Political Culture and Popular Organizations in the Paris Commune of 1871* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 4.

³⁶ Eugene Kamenka, ed., *The Portable Karl Marx* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 214.

April 26th, the *Journal Officiel* published a “Page of History” about the Commune, written from the perspective of one of Thiers’ supporters after the fall of the Commune. This fictional narrator remarks that, “The people had made the revolution; no one in power represented it. Each person worked for his personal ambition: such in Luxembourg with his communist predications, such as at the Ministry of the Interior, such as at the Hotel de Ville, a conspiracy everywhere, a petty conspiracy under the socialist or Jacobin mantle.”³⁷ This fictional account was intended as a warning to the Communards: if their new revolution were to fail, it would be due to their ideological divisions and self-interest. This passage is also significant, because it suggests that the Luxembourg neighborhood was communist. This is the only account of the Commune that ascribed communist ideology to any of the Communards.

It is fair to say that the Commune was an act of patriotic rebellion or self-defense, because the elected officials of the Commune and the journalists of the Commune themselves claimed this. Unlike Marx’s brand of international socialism that rejected nationalism as a bourgeois notion, the Communards more often believed that the establishment of their own republic would spread to other cities of France, and that they were the harbingers of a new French Revolution. Paris’ successful self-defense during the Prussian Siege had contributed to a feeling of national pride, which was already strong in Paris due to its central role in establishing the First Republic in France. Parisians believed that it was they who held authority over their government, in the tradition of great Francophone thinkers like Rousseau and Voltaire. They also believed that they, as the capital and as the birthplace of nearly all French revolutions, were

³⁷ Victor Brunel, ed., *Réimpression du Journal Officiel de la République Française sous La Commune du 19 Mars au 24 Mai* (Paris: 1871), 398. “Le peuple avait fait la révolution; personne au pouvoir ne la représentait. Chacun travaillait pour son ambition personnelle: tel au Luxembourg avec ses prédications communistes, tel au ministère de l’intérieur, tel à l’hôtel de ville, conspiration partout, conspiration mesquine sous le manteau socialiste ou Jacobin.”

accountable for the state of democracy for the entire country. These feelings of responsibility and power generated patriotic ideals. But the two ideas that the Commune was an act of patriotism and that it was a political revolution, though presented as competing ideas, need not be mutually-exclusive.

These Parisian workers had planned for decades to re-establish what every French insurrectionist had attempted to establish before them: a democratic system that would allow them social and economic equality. It was during the reign of Napoleon III that the Communards had their first taste of real monarchy, and even the Second Republic, established after Napoleon III's defeat at Sedan and his capture in 1870 did not, to them, qualify as a true republic. Thiers had in fact been a historian—the historian of the reign of Napoleon I, so the workers saw Thiers' authority as simply a continuation of Bonapartism.³⁸ They believed that the Second Republic under Thiers did not represent them and was not a true republic at all—worse, they believed that their government was deceiving the nation into believing that Thiers and his Versailles government had French interests at heart, while they were actually interested only in negotiating peace with Prussia at any cost. The workers believed that by allowing the Prussian army to occupy Paris, Thiers' government had committed treason, and it was their prerogative, as well as their duty to defend Paris from this invasion as well as from its traitors.

The health of the French republic is mentioned in nearly every publication issued by the Commune. The phrase “Vive la Republique! Vive la Commune!” closes most of these documents. It is clear that Commune, to the workers residing in Paris, was synonymous with the republic. They identified the start of the Commune as a revolution, and not a revolt, and believed

³⁸ Samuel Bernstein, “The Paris Commune,” *Science & Society* 5, no. 2 (Spring 1941): 120.

that this political act would ensure a just society, which they did not find under Thiers' bourgeoisie-supported republic, and certainly not under Napoleon III's reign.

These goals were the overtly political motivations behind the Commune's emergence, but evidence of the decades of unrest and development of specific ideologies can also be found in the official literature, such as flyers and articles published in socialist newspapers. Although identifying specific political ideologies is particularly difficult in the study of the Commune (since so many disparate groups existed with many different theories), several political groups did have a strong and demonstrable impact on the Commune's leadership. All of the members of the Central Committee had been leaders in their own socialist associations, and each association had its own ideological influences. Many of the Commune's leaders had alliances with multiple groups, and many groups themselves contained different and conflicting ideas about socialism. This complexity, compounded by the question of whether the Communards were motivated more by patriotism is expressed in Eugence Schulkind's introduction to his *The Paris Commune of 1871: The View from the Left*: "...the ideological spectrum of the participants will not be easily reconstructed with precision. Besides, no commonly accepted 'answers' to questions involving the extent of socialist consciousness are likely to be forthcoming since, in part, there is no commonly accepted use of the term 'socialist' in relation to the France of 1871."³⁹ The complexity of the French socialists' political ideologies makes the task of discerning a unifying doctrine or political platform especially difficult, but by distinguishing the associations in which Central Committee members participated, the ideologies behind the Commune can begin to become clearer. Since the committee members were as diverse in their associations as their constituents, they may provide an accurate sample of which political associations were most

³⁹ Schulkind, *The Paris Commune of 1871*, 28.

influential. Because these officials were elected from their individual arrondissements, they may also represent the popular trends within their particular neighborhoods. An identification of the political ideologies that influences the Central Committee members of the Commune, in conjunction with an analysis of the literature that they published in the form of posters, flyers, and newspaper articles, helps illuminate the motivations that inspired the outbreak and evolution of the Commune.

Ninety-two positions were open for election to the Central Committee, twenty-one of which were filled by moderate or radical republicans with no specific ties to workers' organizations, forty-four of those elected were Neo-Jacobins or Blanquists, and eighteen were members of the International and were mostly followers of a Proudhonist ideology⁴⁰. The remaining seats were not filled, because either a candidate was elected to two seats, or because a candidate could not fill the role, as was the case with Auguste Blanqui, who was elected as head of the Central Committee in almost every arrondissement. By mid-April, a second round of elections were called, because several of the Committee members had been killed in skirmishes with the Versaillais, and because all of the moderate republicans had left office due to the predominance of left-leaning persuasions among the Central Committee. These associations are important to note, because the influential figures that led these men of action are indicative of the political agendas behind the masses of workers who instituted the Commune.

The most active group among the Parisian working class prior to the Commune was the Blanquists. Inspired by the revolutionary rhetoric and actions of Auguste Blanqui, this group aimed to undermine Thiers' presidency and restore what they believed was true democracy by revolutionary action—action that could, and almost certainly would, necessitate violence. Their

⁴⁰ Bernstein, "The Paris Commune," 124.

beliefs were similar to those of old followers of Robespierre. They were inspired by the Revolution of 1789, and wanted to restore this first republic, but with a socialist motive.

By the 1860's there were around 3,000 Blanquists living in Paris, divided into smaller groups of ten, who actively recruited Parisian workers to their cause.⁴¹ Their numbers were comprised of predominantly Left-Bank students and journalists. This would seem to be an unlikely following for such a revolutionary activist, but their exposure and allegiance to Blanqui came about while he was imprisoned in Paris in the mid-1860's, where students and workers were able to visit him and discuss politics and past revolutions.⁴² In addition, Blanqui was an active writer and journalist. He had received an excellent education in both law and medicine before deciding to pursue politics and his brother, Jérôme-Adolphe Blanqui was a notable economist who studied labor economics. Surprisingly, these intellectuals were advocates for insurrection by force, which would theoretically be led by a small group of conspirators, and not by popular demonstrations or through elections. Even more surprisingly, these young academics were often themselves armed when participating in demonstrations. It was often during these demonstrations, in cafés, and even in prison, that Blanquists would win workers for their cause.⁴³

Still embittered by Napoleon III's coup d'état which had effectively supplanted the Second Republic, Blanquists aimed to immediately remedy this assault on their hard-won republic. It has been claimed that they were the only organized revolutionary group in France.⁴⁴ This seems credible since, though there were many organized socialist groups in France, the Blanquists were the only group attempting immediate revolution. Perhaps because of their

⁴¹ Stewart Edwards, ed., *The Communards of Paris, 1871* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973), 16.

⁴² Johnson, *The Paradise of Association*, 20 (footnote 12).

⁴³ Edwards, *The Communards of Paris*, 16.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

scholarly grounding, Parisian Blanquists also participated in more theoretical and organizational pursuits. Many Blanquists, by the 1860's, had joined the Parisian branch of the International, though the majority of them, by the 1870's, had abandoned Blanquism and had shifted their allegiance to Proudhon.

Blanqui was still alive and at the height of his political influence in the late 1860's and early 1870's. Though elected head of the Central Committee, Blanqui never actually participated in the Paris Commune, because he has been imprisoned by Versailles troops only days before the insurrection. It was his leadership in the attempted insurrection on October 31, 1870 that had prompted Thiers and the National Assembly to court-martial him. The Central Committee went to great lengths to argue for his release, even offering to release all of the Commune's prisoners in exchange, but Versailles knew that Blanqui's release would give too much strength to the movement, so he remained imprisoned throughout the 72 days of the uprising. The main aim of the Blanquists during the Paris insurrection, besides the institution of a socialist commune, was to have Blanqui freed. After his release, it was assumed that he would lead the Parisian rebellion to a peaceful conclusion. How exactly he would accomplish this feat was never clearly articulated—nor was his ideology, at least not clearly. He did, however share clear opinions about social issues and proposed how a revolution should take place. He supported the idea of conspiratorial coup to eventually overthrow the existing republic as a stage toward a socialist revolution. This revolution, he believed, had to precede any social change, because trying to negotiate for their terms would only result in compromise with the bourgeoisie and eventually a loss of the cause entirely. This theory was confirmed by the workers' losses in the elections of late 1870 and early 1871. Blanquists believed that their small, secret group who would carry out an initial coup d'état would then need to establish authoritarian rule temporarily until peace

could be established. Blanqui published these detailed directions in *Instructions pour une prise d'armes*, which was widely circulated among his followers. Only after the revolution had taken place and new rule was established could elections be held and a republic re-established.

Blanqui's political and social doctrines differed from those of Marx and Proudhon. As an atheist, Blanqui differed from Proudhon by viewing religion as a vehicle for the advancement of the bourgeoisie. The overwhelming majority of the French population was Catholic. The Church had, for a long time, reinforced the idea that every man had his affixed place in the social order, thus discouraging any social unrest. The church hierarchy itself was based upon the same social structures that separated the bourgeoisie and the lower classes. He also believed in the empowerment and political advancement of the lower classes—not uncommon for any 19th century socialist, especially after the establishment of the French branches of the International, but he did not focus his attentions on the working class specifically, as Proudhon and Marx had. Instead, he targeted the bourgeois-favoring system and aimed to replace it with an egalitarian system, which eventually would be able to represent members of the lower and middle classes. Nevertheless, Blanqui did win the support of Marx, who claimed that his leadership was the missing piece that could have brought a more favorable outcome to the Commune. Blanquism was Marx's preferred form of French socialist, as Marx's and Proudhon's beliefs had become sharply divided and their early correspondence had devolved into a feud.

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon was the second most influential figure in Paris, around whom a political group was formed. Though Proudhon had died in 1865, his writings, which by the time of his death promoted a federalist approach to socialism, had not been forgotten by the Parisian

workers. His followers had, in the 1860's, replaced Marx's influence in the International.⁴⁵ His federalist ideas stressed the importance of local autonomy. These differences will be addressed more thoroughly in the following chapter, but it is important to note that while, by the 1870s, Proudhon believed in strong local confederation with minimal governmental structure, Marx was encouraging the rule of the proletariat, which many socialists at the time, implied a dictatorship led by this social class.

Born into a religious, working-class family, Proudhon grew out of his station into a well-trained intellectual who knew Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and several other contemporary European languages.⁴⁶ His earlier political theories revolved around the notion that anarchy was the best means to achieve equality, and that in the absence of rigid laws, morality would guide society. This morality was originally based in his religious faith, but he later turned this sense of morality against the Church, replacing it with his own secular morality. By the 1860s, Proudhon no longer had enough confidence in society's ability to govern itself by morals alone, and began publishing works that supported a federalist-style government. He believed that the state should protect its people from capitalism, by means of a national bank and an income tax on capitalists.

The most important aspect of Proudhon's writings that relate to the Paris Communards was his belief in mutualism and workers' autogestion. Rather than having a state-owned or capitalist-owned workplace, Proudhon believed that the workers themselves should own the means of production in the form of co-ops. He did not believe that the state should control the workers or their production, though the state should regulate the capitalist bourgeoisie. His

⁴⁵ Jules L. Puech, *Le Proudhonisme dans l'Association internationale des travailleurs* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1907), 71.

⁴⁶ K. Steven Vincent, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 6.

mutualist theory was supported by workers in France who did believe that they should have collective ownership of the factories and workshops. Proudhon's notion that labor is the only legitimate source of property was both well-received and promoted, even in the revolutions of 1848. Though he lost faith in the idea that society could be guided entirely by morality, he never wavered in his conviction that the working classes were able to, and should, manage themselves, and their means of production.

Proudhon's followers who took part in the Commune were often simultaneously members of various organizations, and his followers very diverse. Because Proudhon wrote and developed theories over several tumultuous decades, and because the many political shifts that took place in 19th century France changed his views somewhat frequently, he never developed a "systematic social theory"⁴⁷. Instead, his different beliefs and often-incompatible theories were adopted by the varied workers' groups in France. This led scholars, such as Stewart Edwards, to argue that the Communards, "[were] suspicious of political power and this gave their thinking an anarchist tinge more in the tradition of the French socialist-anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon..."⁴⁸ However, Edwards' contention does not withstand critical scrutiny, because the Communards were far from anarchists, and promoted a social democracy almost unanimously. Many Proudhonist workers in the French branch of the International exercised the most influence in the Commune. Notably, Eugène Varlin, Beslay, Langlois, and Courbet were followers of Proudhon.⁴⁹

Proudhonist ideology can be found in both the official documents, as well as unofficial documents published by the International in the *Journal Officiel*. On March 27th, they published

⁴⁷ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁸ Edwards, *The Communards of Paris*, 30.

⁴⁹ Vincent, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon*, 232.

in the Journal a manifesto that made several demands that echoed Proudhon's ideological platform: "What have we demanded? The organization of credit, of exchange, of association, in order to ensure the worker the integral value of his work."⁵⁰ This was signed by many leading members of the International who were also Central Committee members. The direct demand for workers to receive the benefits of their work and the demand for organization of credit come directly from Proudhon's canon.

The most dominant socialist organization in France in the 1860s and through the time of the Commune was undoubtedly the International Workingmen's Association. Founded in London in 1864 upon Marx's theories outlined in *The Communist Manifesto*, the International had opened a Paris branch in 1865.⁵¹ Its most influential member in France was Eugène Varlin, who corresponded with Marx and promoted the socialist Commune in Paris.⁵² The International, however, had no ideological unity. The Marxian ideas that were the basis for its foundation in England had been replaced by Proudhonian theories by the time of the Commune. The French historian Jules L. Puech, later claimed, "La période française de l'Internationale, c'est la période proudhonienne."⁵³ He asserted that while socialism had become popular in Germany, and Russia had nihilism, the French had their own unifying leftist national identity in Proudhon's mutualism. In contrast to Marx, the French branch was indeed originally founded in the Proudhonian assumption that socio-economic reform could be possible in existing political conditions, though this generally-held belief had changed by 1871.

⁵⁰ Brunel, *Réimpression du Journal Officiel*, 66. "Qu'avons-nous demandé? L'organisation du crédit, de l'échange, de l'association, afin d'assurer au travailleur la valeur intégrale de son travail."

⁵¹ Johnson, *The Paradise of Association*, 20-21.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵³ Puech, *Le Proudhonisme*, 6.

Many other socialist organizations existed in the latter half of the 19th century in Paris. There existed many organizations and associations for specific trades. The Parisian “working class” was not actually factory workers or laborers, but skilled tradesmen and artisans, they had been able to organize and form their own coalitions and associations for the benefit of their own particular trades. The most influential of these organizations was the Federated Council of Trade Unions. This group and the International were the two dominant associations in the Commune.⁵⁴ Many veteran revolutionaries who had participated in 1848 were still associated with Jacobin groups. These followers of the ideas and practices of Robespierre played a minor role and were not great in number, but Robespierre’s influence was still strong in 1871, and those who had been inspired by Robespierre were often aligned with Blanqui as well. One of the most prominent members of the Central Committee, Felix Pyat, was one such Jacobin. His revolutionary ideas were so radical that, in 1868, he had gone to London to help found a new French section of the International. This sect was never recognized by the actual First International, which was eager to distinguish itself from this extremist group that called for the assassination of Napoleon III.⁵⁵ Because of this rivalry, Pyat and his followers were in constant quarrels with their fellow committee members who associated with the International.

Though the organizations and clubs who had anticipated revolutionary change in Paris were varied and divided in opinion on several particular matters, they each shared several common aspirations. All of these participatory organizations wanted to see a weakening of the bourgeoisie class, a strengthening of the working or the artisan class, the end of Thiers’ authority, and municipal autonomy for Paris, as well as an ousting of Prussia’s troops from Paris.

⁵⁴ Schulkind, “The Activity of Popular Organizations,” 397.

⁵⁵ Bernstein, “The Paris Commune,” 126.

For this reason, each socialist organization needed to find common ground with other such socialist organizations and to cooperate with them to achieve these ends. These goals would only be realized if ideological differences were put aside and a generic form of socialism could be created and promoted by the Parisian working classes. The hybrid socialism would need a platform in order to link the many workers' groups in Paris and would also need a particular rhetoric that would be common to all. This hybridization did take shape in the months leading up to the Commune: cooperation among socialist organizations did exist, and these factional groups did find ways to promote their shared interests. One such form of cooperation was seen in the Corderie, named for the building that housed the International, the Delegation of Twenty Arrondissements, and the Trade Union Federation, where these influential groups were able to collaborate within an unofficial association.⁵⁶

The Paris Commune was not the first time that distinct working class organizations had to merge to pursue a common goal. The October and January insurrections are both examples of their co-mingling, as well as the fluidity of the International. The difference in March of 1871 was that these clubs and organizations had grown more insular and more isolated from one another. Many Blanquists had left the International in favor of their smaller, more cohesive groups. This was a challenge to those workers who wanted to be liberated from “feudal” working conditions and terms, and leaders of the Commune would attempt to reconcile these inconsistent viewpoints in their official literature.

Aside from a shared common goal to end Thiers' rule over Paris, the Parisian workers did have one other uniting factor and this was their participation in the Parisian National Guard. Throughout the Franco-Prussian War, many workers and artisans had lost their employment due

⁵⁶ Christiansen, *Paris Babylon*, 274-275.

to economic instability and a decline in production. The French government, first under Napoleon III, aimed to remedy this by offering these workers positions in the military. They formed their own military units, trained themselves, and often paid for their own arms. The government, in turn, paid them for their service. This payment was often a fraction of what they had earned in factories, but this allowed them to continue to live in cities and support themselves. This military training and the responsibility for defending their own city united Paris's workers under one cause and promoted a sense of patriotism. The governing body of the National Guard in Paris, the Central Committee, was the governing body of the Commune after its founding. Though they quickly called for elections to replace their authority, many of the same leaders were elected to the new Central Committee of the Paris Commune.

The Central Committee made clear that they did not believe that they were living within a republic under Thiers' rule, and clearly stated that a true republic was their first goal. This would only be realized through cooperation, as they stated in the *Partie Officiel* of the *Journal*... "Point de divisions! Unité parfaite et liberté pleine et entière!"⁵⁷ This notion that all social revolutionaries must overcome their diverse and divisive opinions is repeated throughout literature published by the Central Committee in the *Journal Officiel*, but these statements only appear until early April. After this point, it seems that unity had been achieved and their cause was solidified. It seems that Thiers and his troops were aware that the Communards had conflicting ideas that could be manipulated to their advantage and the Central Committee recognizes their own perceived weakness in the *Journal Officiel* as they state, "The partisans of Versailles count mainly on the

⁵⁷ Brunel, *Réimpression du Journal Officiel*, 8. "No more divisions! Perfect unity and total and complete liberty!"

lack of money in Paris and on our internal divisions.”⁵⁸ This division was overcome by the repetition of shared goals among Communards.

The immediate need for the establishment of a true republic is one often recurring theme throughout the Central Committee’s publications. In the first edition of the *Journal Officiel*, the Central Committee stated this ambition clearly, “Thanks to you all, and Paris and France together lay the foundations of an acclaimed Republic with all its consequences, the only Government that will end forever the invasions and civil wars.”⁵⁹ This passage illustrates the Communards’ belief that they had achieved their goal of establishing a republic, not just for themselves, but for all of France. They strongly believed that their concept of the commune would spread to the provinces, which it later did. They also relied upon these provincial communes for support and attempted to associate these communes so that they could defend one another. They did this by sending emissaries and manifestos to other French departments to rally for their cause.⁶⁰ This sentiment of republican unity that was needed through other departments of France is reiterated on March 19th in the Journal: “The provinces, by uniting with the capital, will prove to Europe and the world that France as a whole wants to avoid any internal division, any bloodshed.”⁶¹ This unity among the Parisian Communards, and among other communes in France, was not only a

⁵⁸ Ibid., 160. “Les partisans de Versailles comptent surtout sur le manque d’argent à Paris et sur nos divisions intestines.”

⁵⁹ Ibid., 5. “Merci à tous, et que Paris et la France jettent ensemble les bases d’une République acclamée avec toutes ses conséquences, le seul Gouvernement qui fermera pour toujours lère des invasions et des guerres civiles.”

⁶⁰ Martin Phillip Johnson, “Enlightening the ‘Misguided Brothers of the Countryside’: Republican Fraternalism in the Paris Commune of 1871,” *French History*, no.4 (1997): 411.

⁶¹ Brunel, *Réimpression du Journal Officiel*, 7. “La province, en s’unissant à la capitale, prouvera à l’Europe et au monde que la France tout entière veut éviter toute division intestine, toute effusion de sang.”

validation of their cause, but a prerequisite for their establishment of a new republic—a socialist republic. This, the Communards believed, would lead to similar movements throughout Europe.

The Communards envisioned not only a republic—there was already a republic in place, though it was dominated by the bourgeois classes that supported Thiers; they required a distinctly socialist republic. Though Gould asserts that the Commune was apolitical, and not truly socialist (as the Revolution of 1848 had been)⁶², socialist rhetoric and steps taken to install socialist reforms are pervasive in Communard literature. On March 26th, the International published an article in the *Journal Officiel* which stated,

The communal revolution affirms these principles, it excludes any cause of conflict in the future. Will you hesitate to give him your final sanction? The independence of the commune is the guarantee of a contract whose freely debated clauses will put an end to class antagonism and ensure social equality. We have claimed the emancipation of the workers and the communal delegation is the guarantee, because it must provide every citizen with the means to defend his rights, to effectively control the actions of his agents responsible for the management of his interests, and to determine the progressive application of social reforms. The autonomy of each commune removes all oppressive character from its demands and affirms the Republic in its highest expression.⁶³

⁶² Gould, *Insurgent Identities*, 4-7.

⁶³ Brunel, *Réimpression du Journal Officiel*, 66. “La révolution communale affirme ces principes, elle écarte toute cause de conflit dans l'avenir. Hésitez-vous à lui donner votre sanction définitive? L'indépendance de la commune est le gage d'un contrat dont les clauses librement débattues feront cesser l'antagonisme des classes et assureront l'égalité sociale. Nous avons revendiqué l'émancipation des travailleurs et la délégation communale en est la garantie, car elle doit fournir à chaque citoyen les moyens de défendre ses droits, de contrôler d'une manière efficace les actes de ses mandataires chargés de la gestion de ses intérêts, et de déterminer l'application progressive des réformes sociales. L'autonomie de chaque commune enlève tout caractère oppressif à ses revendications et affirme la République dans sa plus haute expression.”

The need for a distinctly socialist republic in France appears in nearly every issue of the *Journal Officiel*, both in the *Partie Officielle*, and in articles submitted by the public.⁶⁴ Most mentions of socialism are expressions of celebration, such as “To repeated cheers have been added energetic protests against all the enemies of our social regeneration,”⁶⁵ and, “Vive the Republic, one and indivisible, democratic and social!”⁶⁶ On May 4th, the *Journal Officiel* published the minutes of a meeting of the Central Committee, during which M. Jourde stated,

Let's not go back to 93; the economic conditions are completely changed: in 93, the country lived by its products, today it lives mainly with foreign products, and these products must allowed to be brought, and before all must we must ensure the exchange of products. It is only by operating in this manner that we can give the workers instruments of work and struggle, and I believe that this could be done by practicing socialism; but to reach my goal, it is necessary, for me, that the delegates be placed under the sole control of the Commune, and may make markets in all the places of Europe.⁶⁷

After the establishment of this new republic, the Central Committee's primary concern was to protect it from Versailles troops and reaffirm its strength through popular election. On

⁶⁴ Some further examples of the Commune's conception of a social republic, and expressions of the need for social reforms and a socialist government can be found in: Brunel, *Réimpression du Journal Officiel*, 17, 37, 44, 48, 66, 67, 102, 111, 115, 116, 117, 128, 129, 143, 156, 186, 189, 226, 242, 260, 278, 308, 315, 328, 388, ...

⁶⁵ Ibid., 172. “Aux vivats répétés se sont ajoutées des protestations énergiques contre tous les ennemis de notre régénération sociale.”

⁶⁶ Ibid., 210. “Vive la République, une et indivisible, démocratique et sociale!”

⁶⁷ Ibid., 464. “Ne revenons pas à 93; les conditions économiques sont complètement changées: en 93, le pays vivait de ses produits, aujourd'hui, il vit surtout avec les produits étrangers, et ces produits il faut les faire venir, et avant tout il faut assurer l'échange des produits. Ce n'est qu'en opérant de cette manière que l'on pourra donner aux travailleurs des instruments de travail, de lutte, et je croyais faire, en agissant ainsi, du socialisme pratique; mais pour atteindre mon but, il faut pour moi les délégués soient placés sous le seul contrôle de la Commune, et puissent faire des marchés sur toutes les places d l'Europe.”

March 19th, the *Journal Officiel* published, “[The municipalities] ... have united themselves to ensure the safety of the Republic and prepare the elections of the communal council that will take place.”⁶⁸

Though all members of the Commune could agree that this new republic needed to be established, the nationalistic rhetoric and demand for revolution stemmed from Blanquist and Neo-Jacobin groups. That is not to say that by 1871 Proudhonists did not believe that a similar revolution was necessary, but Proudhonists were more concerned with working conditions and the municipal authority of Paris specifically, than a new French Revolution. In fact, by 1871, Proudhon supported the idea that nationalism, and the concept of nations themselves, were objectionable. This opinion, which Proudhon shared with Marx, was generally never accepted by the Parisians. Though the majority of Parisians were patriotic, even nationalistic, there were those so inspired by Proudhon (and possibly Marx) that they expressed this notion in their writings. On March 26th, the one-hundred and twenty members of the Electoral Committee of the Eleventh Arrondissement signed and distributed a poster announcing their candidates for election to the Central Committee. The poster states, “There will be no more oppressors or oppressed; no longer any distinction of class among citizens; no longer any barriers among nations. Since the family will be the primary form of association, all families will group themselves in a larger one: the nation; nations will fuse into this collective and higher personality: humanity.”⁶⁹ The majority of Paris was concerned with creating a new form of government for France, and this became a central theme in the writings of the Commune. But there were many individuals and

⁶⁸ Ibid., 8. “[les municipalités]... se sont unies à elles pour assurer le salut de la République et préparer les élections du conseil communal qui vont avoir lieu.”

⁶⁹ Cited in: Schulkind, *The Paris Commune of 1871*, 110.

groups who supported more specific and polarized views, such as the end of the concept of nations.

Because the socialist organizations in Paris were so diverse, and often incompatible, they needed to find common ground to overcome the political might of the bourgeoisie. The people themselves, and the government of the Commune, employed several methods in the attempt to unify the discordant leftist unions and associations. On March 20th, the *délégué au Journal Officiel* published, “The proletariat, in the face of the permanent threat of its rights, of the absolute negation of all its legitimate aspirations, of the ruin of the country and all its hopes, understood that it was its imperative duty and its absolute right to take his destiny in hand and to ensure its triumph by seizing power.”⁷⁰ The delegation illustrates several important political grievances shared by the Communards. Most importantly, they unite working classes under one clear identifying term, the “proletariat.” This concept will be discussed in the next chapter, but it is important that a collective identity is formed here, in the beginning of the Commune’s rule. The delegation also identifies the specific grievances of this newly-labeled social class. They specify that their rights and their aspirations were under direct threat by Thiers’ government and the bourgeoisie.

The workers were first identified by the Central Committee as the backbone of the French economy. Secondly, they were the oppressed class, seeking social justice. The *Journal Officiel* printed a manifesto written by one workers’ syndicate on March 22nd that stated,

⁷⁰ Brunel, *Réimpression du Journal Officiel*, 17. “Le proletariat, en face de la menace permanente de ses droits, de la négation absolue de toutes ses légitimes aspirations, de la ruine de la patrie et de toutes ses espérances, a compris qu’il était de son devoir impérieux et de son droit absolu de prendre en main ses destinées et d’en assurer le triomphe en s’emparant du pouvoir.”

The difficult times we are going through must have led us to serious reflections about our social position as workers. We must ask ourselves if we, producers, must continue to make those who produce nothing fruitful; if the system we have followed so far is destined to exist always, even though it is completely opposed to us.⁷¹

This statement clearly identifies the working class as oppressed by the economic institutions in France, and states that they are the class that produces, while the higher classes produce nothing and benefit most. This is standard socialist rhetoric, but here it is important, because it reiterates the common struggle in Paris, while implying that all workers have *been* fighting for the same cause, prior to the establishment of the Commune. Most importantly, the workers are identified in the *Journal Officiel* as the conveyors of true liberty and democracy. The same article continues, “Let us prove by our attachment to the holy cause of democracy that we are worthy of all the respect due to us.”⁷² This identification of the working class in France not only states that they are fighting for the “holy” cause of democracy, but that for this reason they are worthy of respect that they had not been given in the past. The use of the word “sainte” in this article is unusual, because secularization was another important goal of the Communards, but it serves as a testament to the nobility of their cause and can be seen again on March 25th in an obituary of a fallen Commune: “He has always fought, he has always suffered for our holy cause.”⁷³ These sentiments were reiterated on April 3rd in an article written by J. B. Clément for the *Journal*

⁷¹ Ibid., 37. “L’*époque difficile que nous traversons doit nous avoir amenés à des réflexions sérieuses au sujet de notre position sociale comme travailleurs. Nous devons nous demander si nous, producteurs, nous devons continuer à faire vivre grasement ceux qui ne produisent rien; si le système que l’on a suivi jusqu’ici est destiné à exister toujours, alors même qu’il nous est complètement opposé.*”

⁷² Ibid., 37. “*Prouvons par notre attachement à la sainte cause de la démocratie que nous sommes dignes de tous les égards qui nous sont dus.*”

⁷³ Ibid., 44. “*Il a toujours lutté, il a toujours souffert pour notre sainte cause.*”

Officiel, along with the religious tones: “Tell them that the pale [the royalists and the bourgeoisie] are the devourers of human flesh and that the reds are the bread-eaters. Tell them finally that the poor, the workers, the honest people are red, that you are the nature of it, that Lamennais and Proudhon were, and that God, if it existed, would be with us.”⁷⁴ This article identifies not only the working class, but the poor and “honest men” as part of the “red.” Though they might not have been workers or even socialists, the Communards believed that they were the champions of all people who were not from an aristocratic or bourgeois background. Clément also uses religion in this passage to dignify the cause of the workers—but he is careful to point out that God may not actually exist for those who were atheists. This notion that God (if he existed) was on the side of the workers, or at least the notion that their cause was the most noble one, was cemented in the minds of the workers by their successful program of self-defense during the Prussian siege in 1870. While Thiers’ armies had been surrendered to Bismarck, Paris was successfully staving off the enemy. This gave a sense of pride to the working-class Parisians, as well as vindication for their cause.

Instances of the Communards’ own concept of a proletariat pervade in the *Journal Officiel*⁷⁵, and these examples reinforce the notion that it was the high principles of the working class that would ensure their revolutionary success. On April 1st, Charles Beslay submitted an article to the *Journal Officiel*, which stated that,

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 143. “Dites-leur que les pâles [the royalists and the bourgeoisie] sont les dévorants de chair humaine et que les rouges sont les mangeurs de pain. Dites-leur enfin que les pauvres, les travailleurs, les honnêtes gens sont des rouges, que vous en êtes que la nature en est, que Lamennais et Proudhon en étaient, et que Dieu, s’il existait, serait avec nous.”

⁷⁵ Further examples can be found in: Brunel, *Réimpression du Journal Officiel*, 17, 28, 55, 155, 168, 179, 225, 321, 324, 410, 418, 419, 491, 504, 649, 654.

...the Republic of 1871 is a worker who especially needs liberty to cultivate peace. Peace and work! this is our future! Here is the certainty of our revenge and our social regeneration, and thus understood the Republic can still make France the support of the weak, the protector of the workers, the hope of the oppressed in the world, and the foundation of the universal republic.⁷⁶

It was paramount to the Commune's success for the workers to find support outside of the city's walls. To do this, Parisian journalists needed to present this new notion of the worker as someone with whom the French—and all Europeans—could identify. One inspiration of the Communards' was the American abolitionists who had won the American Civil War. Knowing that nearly every other nation in Europe was sympathetic to the Northern American cause, the Parisian socialists fashioned themselves as similar great emancipators. On April 5th, Edouard Portalis published,

That which we wanted, the American citizen in question, was, moreover, hesitant to say it. Had he, otherwise, not dared to write foolishly—foolish the Lincolns, the Henry Wards, the Beechers, the Sumners, the Grants, and all those great spirits who reclaimed, in the name of the people, the emancipation of the labor without which the liberation of the Negroes would only be the consequence! foolish those who disputed the slaver's domination of the fertile plains of the West, the promised land of the workers! foolish proletarians fighting the encroachments of parasitism!⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Ibid., 128. "...la République de 1871 est un travailleur qui a surtout besoin de liberté pour féconder la paix. Paix et travail! voilà notre avenir! Voilà la certitude de notre revanche et de notre régénération sociale, et ainsi comprise la République peut encore faire de la France le soutien des faibles, la protectrice des travailleurs, l'espérance des opprimés dans le monde, et le fondement de la République universelle."

⁷⁷ Ibid., 168. "Ce que l'on voulait, le citoyen américain dont il est ici question s'est, d'ailleurs, bien gardé de le dire. Eût-il, sans cela, osé écrire *insensé*—Insensés le les Lincoln, les Henry

To make the proletarian struggle more appealing internationally, Portalis states that the American Civil War was waged on behalf of the American workers (and that the liberation of slaves was merely a consequence of this class struggle). He likens the Communards to American heroes such as Lincoln, Beecher-Stowe, and Grant, and relates their causes. It is the intention, through the *Journal Officiel*, to unite the Communards under a worthy cause, but it was imperative to justify this cause, not only to themselves, but to a larger community in Europe.

But justification for their cause was not the only reason that Paris wished to communicate with communities outside of Paris—and France. The Paris branch of the International, in an attempt to create an international movement, circulated articles that used the Paris Commune as an inspiration for other possible uprisings. On April 2nd, *La Révolution*, a political newspaper published by the gare d'Ivry and Bercy sections of the Paris International published a call to arms for both their fellow Parisians and International members abroad:

As for the schemers of all kinds, who cannot conceive of a state in which there will be no more monopolies or privileges, and where all will be compelled to produce in exchange for the rights that society assures, they will accept, emigrate or be annihilated.—Citizens of the International, hasten to act; Paris showed you the road. Serfs of the universe, stand! the Revolution calls you!—Long live the political and social Revolution!⁷⁸

Ward, les Beecher, les Sumner, les Grant et tous ces grands esprits qui réclamaient, au nom du peuple, l'émancipation du travail dont l'affranchissement des nègres n'était que la conséquence! insensés ceux qui disputaient à la domination esclavagiste les plaines fertiles de l'Ouest, cette terre promise des travailleurs! insensés les prolétaires luttant contre les empiétements du parasitisme!"

⁷⁸ Firmin Maillard, *Histoire des journaux publiés à Paris pendant le Siège et sous la Commune: 4 septembre 1870 au 28 mai 1871* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1871), 191. "Quant aux intrigants de toutes sortes, qui ne peuvent concevoir un État dans lequel il n'y aura plus ni monopoles, ni privilèges, et où tous seront obligés de produire en échange des droits qu'assure la société, ils accepteront, émigreront ou seront anéantis.—Citoyens de l'Internationale, hâtez-vous d'agir; Paris vous a

This article did not only serve as a call to arms, but an identification of those who opposed the revolution as “schemers.” The authors echo the idea that their cause was universal in the phrase, “Serfs of the universe, stand!” They also reinforce the political nature of their revolution by identifying it as both social and political. Though it can be assumed that any truly socialist movement is inherently political, this author is making it known that social reform would not suffice—a political revolution and shift in power would be necessary to secure these changes. Though many articles published under the Commune condemn those who do not support the revolutionary cause, very few threatened their antagonists as this author did with “emigrat[ion]” or “annihilat[ion].”

Another political issue that united the Communards, which was mentioned frequently by the Central Committee and members of the Commune’s press to intentionally unify discordant socialist groups, was the notion the working class needed to be emancipated from the bourgeoisie-imposed conditions that had threatened their livelihoods and their freedom. The bourgeoisie-supported government in Versailles was identified as the suppressor of these rights. Not only did this government threaten the freedoms of the workers, but in doing so, they threatened the nation and its economy as a whole. In the same article published by the délégué au *Journal Officiel* on March 20th, the committee closes with the passage, “The course of progress, interrupted for a moment, will resume its march, and the proletariat will accomplish, despite everything, its emancipation!”⁷⁹ It is implied that it was Napoleon III’s rule and Thiers’ government that had been the catalysts for the interruption of the course of progress. Later, Léo

montré la route. Serfs de l'univers, debout! la Révolution vous appellée!—Vive la Révolution politique et sociale!”

⁷⁹ Brunel, *Réimpression du Journal Officiel*, 17. “Le cours du progrès, un instant interrompu, reprendra sa marche, et le prolétariat accomplira, malgré tout, son emancipation!”

Frankel, a delegate for the commission of work and exchange within the Central Committee, and a devoted follower of Proudhon and member of the International, clearly identified the bourgeoisie as the oppressors of the working class and likened the working conditions in France to slavery:

In fact, it is useless and immoral to have recourse to an intermediary who has no other function than to levy a tax on the day of the workers he occupies; it is to continue the enslavement of the workers by the centralization of labor in the hands of the exploiter: it is to continue the slave traditions of the bourgeois regimes, bitter enemies, out of interest, of all emancipation of the working class.⁸⁰

The role of the bourgeoisie as managers and owners of the means of production in France was seen by the workers as immoral, and here Frankel asserts that they have no function but to place a “tax” on the production of the workers and profit by the labor of others. He also identifies this as a “regime” of exploiters and slavers.

This identification of a common enemy was a useful tool in the effort to unite the various socialist factions of Paris, but more direct appeals were also used to this end. The International, which was, itself, comprised of individual clubs in Paris—each with its own distinct set of doctrines, call for such a unification in an article published on March 27th in the *Journal Officiel*: “The insolidarity of interests has created general ruin, engendered social warfare; it is to freedom, to equality, to solidarity that one must ask for to maintain the order on

⁸⁰ Ibid., 546. “En effet, il est inutile et immoral d’avoir recours à un intermédiaire qui n’a d’autres fonctions que de prélever un impôt sur la journée des travailleurs qu’il occupe; c’est continuer l’asservissement des travailleurs par la centralisation du travail entre les mains de l’exploiteur: c’est continuer les traditions esclavagistes des régimes bourgeois, ennemis acharnés, par intérêt, de toute-émancipation de la classe ouvrière.”

new bases, to reorganize the work which is its first condition.”⁸¹ The importance of solidarity was repeated in a proclamation written by the Central Committee and posted around Paris on March 25th. The proclamation told the citizens, “Helped by your patriotism and dedication, we have been able to bring to fruition the difficult work undertaken on your behalf. Thank you for your persevering support: solidarity is no longer an empty word: the salvation of the Republic is assured.”⁸² Again, on April 24th, in an article about the telegraph service in Paris, this solidarity achieved by the socialist groups of Paris was celebrated. The director of telegraph lines wrote, “no right will be lost from view, and our task, communal and laborious, in all time will borrow from the freedom of our efforts the sentiment and the colors of the solidarity which assures us the glory of all the interests of each of us.”⁸³ Both the use of the common enemy and the reinforcement of the importance of solidarity appear together as a means of uniting the entirety of the proletariat in a May 7th letter from the International to the Communards. They wrote,

Our brothers! In the presence of the terrible struggle to which the reaction of the Jesuits and the privileged hordes provokes you, in the presence of the hateful slanders which the reaction spreads upon you through the impure mouth of its kept press, it is the duty of all the workers' groups to strongly affirm the fraternal solidarity which binds us all and all across all borders.—These slanders, these insults that are attributed to the working class

⁸¹ Ibid., 66. “L’insolidarité des intérêts a créée la ruine générale, engendré la guerre sociale; c’est à la liberté, à l’égalité, à la solidarité qu’il faut demander d’assurer l’ordre sur de nouvelles bases, de réorganiser le travail qui est sa condition première.”

⁸² Ibid., 54. “Aidés par votre patriotisme et votre dévouement, nous avons pu mener à bonne fin l’oeuvre difficile entreprise en votre nom. Merci de votre concours persévérant: la solidarité n’est plus un vain mot: le salut de la République est assuré.”

⁸³ Ibid., 375. “...aucun droit ne sera perdu de vue, et notre tâche commune et laborieuse dans tous les temps, empruntera à la liberté de nos efforts le sentiment et les couleurs de la solidarité qui nous assure la gloire de tous les intérêts de chacun.”

treated as bandits, robbers "to the ignoble figures"—we accept them for all of us—and we are all guarantors of the sanctity of your cause, which is also ours.⁸⁴

This passage not only repeats the rhetoric used to urge the Communards to put aside their differences, but reiterates the notion that their cause was a “holy” one.

The Central Committee and the International’s calls for solidarity among the factionalized working class organizations are repeated often in issues of the *Journal Officiel*, and persisted throughout the Bloody Week.⁸⁵ On March 19th, in the first issue of the *Journal Officiel*, the Central Committee signed off their announcements of the establishment of the Commune with the phrase, “No divisions! Perfect unity and liberty completely and entirely!”⁸⁶ The Communards believed that their new power in Paris confirmed their unity and believed that this solidarity was one of their greatest and most devastating weapons against the forces of a crumbling bourgeoisie. In the April 22nd, the *Journal Officiel* reprinted an article that had been published in Brussels. It states that, “Without doubt the bourgeoisie will not disappear from the world before a time. Nothing goes back to nothing. But the formidable unity of socialism that has come to be revealed condemns it to be no more than an assembly of disorganized heterogeneous

⁸⁴ Ibid., 497. “Nos frères! En présence de la lutte terrible à laquelle vous provoque la réaction des jésuites et des hordes privilégiées, en présence de calomnies haineuses que la réaction répand sur vous par la bouche impure de sa presse entretenue, il est du devoir de tous les groupes ouvriers d'affirmer hautement la solidarité fraternelle qui nous lie tous et toutes à travers toutes les frontières. — Ces calomnies, ces insultes qu'on décerne à la classe ouvrière traitée de bandits, de voleurs "aux figures ignobles" — nous les acceptons pour nous tous, — et nous nous portons tous garants de la sainteté de votre cause, qui est aussi la nôtre.” “Saintete” can be translated as “sanctity” or “holiness.”

⁸⁵ More examples of the Central Committee and the International expressing the importance of solidarity can be found in: Brunel, *Réimpression du Journal Officiel*, 9, 54, 117, 181, 190, 214, 237, 273, 375, 497, 536, 631, 649.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 8. “Point de divisions! Unité parfait et liberté pleine et entière!”

elements.”⁸⁷ The *Journal*, as a political tool used by the Central Committee to unify the discordant masses of socialists in Paris, needed to express this unity, and on April 29th, the Central Committee’s discussion of this matter was printed. Committee member Jourde claimed that “It is important for the Commune that your newspaper has a unity of direction so that it is edited in such a way that intelligent, serious editors are put in *l’Officiel* and serve the Commune instead of serving it [the newspaper].”⁸⁸

Social emancipation was promised by the Communards to workers, but it was also promised to other members of Parisian society as well (except, of course, to the aristocracy). This notion of emancipation extended to artists: “The committee invites every citizen to communicate to it any proposition, project, memoire, opinion aiming at the progress in the art, the moral or intellectual emancipation of the artists, or the material improvement of their fate.”⁸⁹ It was important for the Central Committee to be both transparent with its people and to invite open discussion and suggestion. It was not enough to simply allow and encourage artistic pursuits; the Central Committee opened their doors to any citizen who could suggest ways that art may serve the Commune and to promote artistic liberty, which had been denied to them under the censorship of Napoleon III and Thiers. They hoped that this stated liberty would inspire great works that would serve as evidence of a successful and productive society. Great artists, such as the realists Jean-François Millet, Gustave Courbet, and Honoré Daumier, had remained in Paris

⁸⁷ Ibid., 345. “Sans doute la bourgeoisie ne disparaîtra pas du monde avant un temps. Rien ne retourne à rien. Mais l’unité formidable du socialisme qui vient de se révéler la condamne à n’être plus qu’un assemblage désordonné d’éléments hétérogènes.”

⁸⁸ Ibid., 418. “Il est important, pour la Commune, que votre journal ait une unité de direction pour qu’il soit rédigé de façon à ce que des rédacteurs intelligents, sérieux, soient mis à l’Officiel et servent la Commune au lieu de la desservir.”

⁸⁹ Ibid., 274. “Le comité invite tout citoyen à lui communiquer toute proposition, projet, mémoire, avis ayant pour but le progrès dans l’art, l’émancipation morale ou intellectuelle des artistes, ou l’amélioration matérielle de leur sort.”

and were sympathizers to the cause. They created a federation for the preservation of art and promoting “art through liberty.”⁹⁰ The artists of Paris were called upon by the Central Committee on April 6th to reopen museums and organize an art exhibit to display the achievements of the Commune’s artistic communities “the artists of friendly nations.”⁹¹ By April 15th, a committee of artists had been elected and had assembled to create a program to promote the advancement of the arts in the Commune and ensure the artistic liberty of its members. Goustaue Courbet presided over the assembly.⁹² The Committee’s decision to support these artists and involve them in the social welfare of the Commune was an excellent attempt to promote the Commune both inside and outside of its walls. This emancipation for artists also targeted journalists at a time when they were threatened by the federal government. In early March, Thiers and the National Assembly had suppressed six popular newspapers in Paris.⁹³ This strict censorship had enraged the workers of Paris. The Central Committee of the Commune intended to make a point that they were no such tyrants and that the Commune would be a place for free speech (though very few people were left in the city who would have disagreed with the general convictions of the Central Committee).

This emancipation for workers, artists, and journalists was later extended to the entire population of France and to workers of the world. On May 1st, the *Journal Officiel* printed, “It is today not only about the emancipation of a particular class, but of that of the French people, of the workers of the whole world.”⁹⁴ This type of broad statement was typical of the later

⁹⁰ Bernstein, “The Paris Commune,” 133.

⁹¹ Brunel, *Réimpression du Journal Officiel*, 178.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 273.

⁹³ Bernstein, “The Paris Commune,” 120.

⁹⁴ Brunel, *Réimpression du Journal Officiel*, 437. “Il ne s’agit plus seulement aujourd’hui de l’émancipation d’une classe particulière, mais de celle du peuple français, des travailleurs du monde entire.”

publications in the *Journal Officiel*. The workers who began a small, insular revolution intended to liberate the workers of Paris, by late April were seeing their struggle on a much larger scale and believed that their cause would be shared internationally. This cause, they believed, would also be understood and supported by other social classes, including left-leaning members of the bourgeoisie, and begin a widespread trend of such communes across Europe. This type of rhetoric was not uncommon in addresses of the International, because most leaders of the International (especially Marx) always had an international movement in mind, rejecting the very notion of nationalism as another bourgeois ideological instrument for controlling the proletariat, a modern version of the religious “opiate of the people.” On May 7th, the *Journal Officiel* published an example of such an address from the International: “Whatever happens, brothers and sisters of Paris, your work will not perish, for it is the universal work of workers' emancipation, and we will not fail in our duty in always and everywhere pursuing the same aspirations, continuing always and everywhere the same struggle, of which you are the first of the combatants.”⁹⁵ Here the Commune’s leaders diverged from the International in the months leading up to the establishment of the Commune, and during the first half of its administration. While most literature published by the Central Committee of the Commune focused almost entirely upon social revolution for France, the Internationalist members saw the Paris Commune as a starting point for social revolution throughout the entirety of Europe.

Paris did see some of their revolutionary attitude having an effect on other departments of France. One of the larger communes that followed in Paris’ footsteps was in Lyon. This

⁹⁵ Ibid., 497. “Quoi qu’il en arrive, frères et soeurs de Paris, votre oeuvre ne périra pas, car c’est l’oeuvre universelle de l’émancipation ouvrière, et nous ne faillirons pas à notre devoir en poursuivant toujours et partout les mêmes aspirations, en continuant toujours et partout la même lutte, dont vous êtes les premiers des combattants.”

revolution, too, was focused on social revolution and echoed the calls for social reforms emanating from Paris. On March 26th, the *Journal Officiel* published a proclamation from Lyon's Committee of the National Guard: "With the commune the taxes will be alleviated, the public houses will not be wasted, the social institutions awaited with legitimate impatience by the workers will be founded and put into practice. A new era, citizens, begins for our city."⁹⁶

These notions of a unified workers' identity and the need for emancipation from the bourgeoisie's despotic ownership of production were common themes in Proudhon's writings, as well as Marx's. Most of these Proudhonist ideas had been filtered through the International and merged with more modern and much more economically specific ideas from Marx.

These common goals of liberty, a social democracy, and the end of Thiers' rule, which were often vaguely expressed, were repeated to reassert that Communards did share a common goal despite their differences. These shared opinions were evidently political in nature, though they were intentionally simplified. These disunions and the generalized form of democracy that sprang from them do not indicate a lack of political motive behind the Commune, but an intentional effort to unify what was a very diverse, yet definitive political movement. Though the specific ideologies that formed the politics of the Commune were confused amalgamations from leaders of disparate groups over several generations, it can be demonstrated that there were political motivations behind the Commune, which can be clearly identified through analysis of the official documents of the Central Committee.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 46. "Avec la commune les impôts s'allégeront, les derniers publics ne seront plus gaspillés, les institutions sociales attendues avec une légitime impatience par les travailleurs seront fondées et mises en pratique. Une ère nouvelle, citoyens, commence pour notre cité."

Chapter II: Manifestations of Marxist Rhetoric and Ideology in the *Journal Officiel*

For a better understanding of what had occurred during the Commune, including what had motivated Paris' workers to take arms in order to establish their own municipal authority, the earliest historians and journalists turned to Karl Marx, assuming that it was he who had influenced and inspired Paris' proletariat. Karl Marx collected newspaper articles and wrote copiously throughout the seventy-two days of the Commune. Shortly after the fall of the Communards, Marx delivered an address and issued a pamphlet outlining his reactions to the revolution and deductions from the experiment. The address includes a brief historical account of the Commune to dispel some confusion that surrounded the violent event. He had been charged by the General Council of the International to write an "Address to the People of Paris" in March, but Marx was ill in April and May, which delayed its release until May 30th.⁹⁷ Marx had been vocal in his belief that the Parisians had neither the experience nor the infrastructure to overthrow existing powers and establish a viable government. He reiterates this in his address, but draws important lessons from the governance of the Central Committee and sets their principles and social reforms as a model for future social movements. He applauds the bravery and foresight of the Committee and identifies the Commune as the "harbinger of a new society."⁹⁸ This treatise was republished twenty years later with an introduction written by Friedrich Engels, which aimed to clarify Marx's conclusions and discuss the impact that the

⁹⁷ Though Marx was suffering from Bronchitis, Francis Wheen notes that many biographers of Marx attribute his delayed release of the address to an ambivalence toward the Commune. Though he did not send the address to Paris until May 30th, Marx wrote personal letters to International supporters throughout Europe in defense of the Commune. He also published newspaper articles in the Communards' (and his own) defense.

⁹⁸ Marx, *The Civil War in France*, 81.

events of the Commune had on his future work. The address was cited by nearly every subsequent historian of the Commune.

The news of the Commune was surrounded in confusion and outrage. Newspapers reported on the violent incident with condemning remarks about the Communards' folly and bloodlust. The Commune was, at first, viewed by the upper and middle classes of Europe, and by most of Britain, as a repetition of the violent revolutions that had preceded it, but far less justified. Fear of a powerful and determined First International Workingmen's Association plagued Europe, as this group was gaining supporters rapidly and threatened the capitalistic foundations of many a European empire. In reality, the organization, especially in France, was not a coherent, organized unit with an immediate mission to overthrow the capitalist powers. Though supporters of the International in France were also members of a class that desired a revolution to bring an end to their perceived social injustices and oppression, Marx warned the aspiring French revolutionaries that they were not yet prepared to take on the responsibility of governing themselves. Nonetheless, European countries, as well as America, felt threatened and even terrorized by the actions of the radical socialists. Marx's attempts to justify the cause of the Communards and his address supporting their actions solidified his involvement in these events in the European mind. Correctly or not, Marx was perceived as associated with the Commune from its outbreak. After the initial shock of the insurrection and the massacre had passed, the true mercilessness of the Versailles' siege came to light and there was a general outcry for the amnesty of the Communards who had already lost so much and had been subjected to undeservedly harsh trials and penalties. Europe had developed a feeling of pity for the hapless Communards.

To understand the purpose of the Communards and the foundational beliefs behind the events of 1871, most early scholars have sought to identify a common dogma or at least similar beliefs possessed by those who participated in the Commune. In most of these studies, it is surprising to find that there was no central idea of what type of governing body the Commune was meant to be. And there were no comprehensive or encompassing value systems; rather, the Communards, though united under the amorphous label of “socialists” were divided among many distinct, and often incongruous organizations and belief systems. The earliest histories and reports of the Commune assigned its members to Marxist groups, which would be easily assumed since Marx himself, as well as his followers, celebrated the courage of these insurgents and accepted them as their own comrades. But this first histories of the Commune painted a portrait of a Communard imbued with Marx’s doctrines and added to European and American suspicions that Marx had influenced and aided this insurrection.

The advent of the Paris Commune marked an important point in Marx’s ideological development: it was the first time that socialist policies had been put in practice on any significant scale. There seems to be no doubt that Marx, the father of Communism and a leader of socialist thought, had shaped, in some way, the minds of the Communards, so it may seem unexpected that very few of the Communards considered themselves true Marxists or even casual followers of Marx. The International Workingmen’s Association, of which Marx was a large supporter and to whom he was a great inspiration, was alive and well in Paris in the 1870’s, so why is Marx’s name mentioned so rarely by French socialists? *The Communist Manifesto*, published twenty-three years before the Commune, had nearly ceased printing in Europe after the 1848 revolutions in France and Germany. Though its ideas shaped the minds of later generations of revolutionaries and socialist thinkers in France, it was not widely read and Marx himself may

not have been a well-known figure to most French socialists. Instead, the French subversives generally read the works of, or were inspired by the lives of, *French* revolutionaries.

Though Marx and the Commune seemed inextricably linked in the late 19th century, most recent scholars have highlighted the impact that France and the Commune had on Marx's thought, and not the influence that Marx may have had over the Parisians in the 1870's. France had been an important model for Marx from a young age. He was raised and formed his political opinions in a time when the French Revolution of 1789 was still an influential and often-analyzed political event. He witnessed the upheavals that France was experiencing, which Germany only hoped for. It was to Paris that Marx fled in 1843 after censors closed his newspaper in Germany.⁹⁹ It was during this experience that Marx realized that it was the strong proletariat that was required for the revolution to end capitalism. In the 1840's, Paris had a strong, organized working class with revolutionary ideas and experience.¹⁰⁰

But what, if any, influence had Marx's own works had on the Communards? This question has rarely been considered in recent history of the Commune. Roger V. Gould, the leading recent historian of the Commune only mentions this possibility in the introduction to his sociological exploration of workers' identities, *Insurgent Identities*: "This claim¹⁰¹ ought not to be understood as a challenge to the view that by 1848 militant French (and above all Parisian) workers had successfully articulated a distinctly class-based, if not Marxian, understanding of the

⁹⁹ Phil Gasper, ed., *The Communist Manifesto: A Road Map to History's Most Important Political Document* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005), 12-13.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁰¹ Gould, *Insurgent Identities*, 4. Gould claims in *Insurgent Identities* that the Commune was "much more a revolt of city dwellers against the French state than of workers against capitalism."

struggle they were engaging in...¹⁰² This proposes that Marx's ideas were very similar to, if not a contributor to, those expressed by French revolutionary bodies in the 19th century.

Recent historians have explored a variety of sources in an attempt to find the intellectual roots behind the Commune, but surprisingly few consider Marx to have had any influence at all. The accounts written by Communards, often written in exile, provide a glimpse of what they believed were the causes and justifications for insurrection, but these were written sometimes years after the rise and fall of the Paris Commune and present a simpler picture of an organized group of vigilantes fighting for a common objective. It is within the publications of the governing body of the Commune, the Central Committee, that a truer and more complex account may be reconstructed of the beliefs and attitudes that pervaded in the spring of 1871. But to understand these documents, so often lacking in any revolutionary jargon that was so common in memoirs, historical accounts, diaries, and letters, one must understand how diverse these insurgent leaders were in their associations and beliefs. The Commune was certainly an amalgamation of varied socialist organizations and dogmas, brought together by diverse groups of men and women with divergent objectives. The editor-in-chief of the *Journal Officiel* was Charles Longuet, an elected member of the Central Committee and an active member of the International. Most of its contributors were also members of the Central Committee, so it can be said that the journal was more than a publication approved by the governing body, but was essentially created and published by the governing body itself.

Charles Longuet himself was a personal friend of Marx and was well-acquainted with his work. In the 1860s, Longuet had founded two other newspapers: *Écoles de France* and *Rive Gauche*, in which he published Marx's fundamental documents of the International. After the fall

¹⁰² Ibid., 4.

of the Commune, he went to live in exile in London, and married Jenny Marx one year later. Longuet had sat on the General Council of the International before the Commune, and resumed his position in London in 1871. Though he was primarily a supporter of Proudhon (as nearly all French Internationalists were prior to 1871), he also supported Marx's ideas and worked with him during his time on the Council of the International, both before and after the Commune.

The instances of Marxian concepts appearing in Communard literature are many and varied. Throughout the pamphlets, posters, and articles published in the journals, the Marxian concept of the working class is prevalent, with many sources identifying these workers in Marx's terms. Discussions of the workers and working class conditions are innumerable in the decades leading up to the Paris Commune, which is not unexpected given the amount of political turmoil that these workers were already causing, especially after the Revolution of 1848. But the distinctly Marxian ideas about the proletariat began to appear in France in the late 1860's, and by 1871 they were clearly identifiable in socialist literature. The "proletariat," as Marx had conceived it, was mentioned every few days in the *Journal Officiel*, and Marxian ideas about labor and capital, as well as his views on the economy were sprinkled throughout most issues of the Journal. Though a complete version of Marxism was never expressed in France until after the Commune, a basic understanding of the most principal elements, as they appeared in the first chapter of *The Communist Manifesto* were beginning to emerge in socialist writings beginning in the 1860's.

It cannot be claimed that Marx's influence was either ubiquitous or accredited in Parisian sources from the 1870's; it can, however, be said that it was present. One very important piece of evidence can be drawn from sources from the Commune: Marxist jargon. Marx's influence may not have even been known to most of those who followed his teachings, but his beliefs found

their way into French revolutionist vocabulary by the 1870's. Marx, having studied Roman law at the University of Berlin,¹⁰³ may have adopted for his own use the term "proletarii" and adapted it to modern social structures. To the Romans, this term identified a social class that included wage-earners who, for Marx, could be identified in the 19th century as the labor class. The concept of the "proletariat" was only Marx's in name. The focus on the rights of the working class was already popularized by Proudhon and had been broadcasted by members of the International. But Proudhon and Marx—who knew each other well in the 1840's in Paris, and often wrote to one another about political revolution—had become bitter rivals in the mid 19th century, and it was Proudhon who most closely influenced the political minds of the Commune. It would be easy to assume that Marx may have had no influence in shaping the ideas of the working class, as many scholars have, for several reasons. Proudhon was the most famous French thinker of the era who concentrated on the working class and he confronted this issue before Marx did. He had influenced Marx before Marx could possibly have influenced the Communards. Indeed, it was Proudhon's *What is Property* that led Marx to the idea that private property should be abolished. Also, most of the Communards were, admittedly, Proudhonists, which would imply that they disagreed with Marx on the points with which Proudhon would have disagreed with Marx. But the fact remains that Marxist jargon is present in the writings of the Commune—specifically, of the Central Committee in the *Journal Officiel*. In at least thirteen instances, the *Journal Officiel* printed the term "proletariat." Though it had been used by Proudhon before it appeared in Marx's works, there is no denying that it was popularized by *The Communist Manifesto*.

¹⁰³ Sidney Hook, *Marx and the Marxists; the ambiguous legacy* (Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand, 1955), 13.

The term “proletariat,” though it appears throughout socialist literature in the late nineteenth-century, was never ubiquitous until shortly before the advent of the Commune, and begins to become a key part of socialist doctrine at this time. What was once a term to describe workers of any sort, was adapted by nineteenth century socialists to mean laborers, but just before the Commune, as socialist thinkers were gaining momentum, this term took on another connotation: the “proletariat” became not just a class of laborers, but a larger social class, as well as a political term. The French did not only ascribe the term “proletariat” to those who worked in factories or those who engaged in hard labor, but also artisans, craftsmen, or simply those who felt that they had been exploited by the bourgeoisie. In this way, the term reverted to a state more similar to its original Roman meaning: anyone who worked for a wage. Socialists ascribed this term to themselves, whether they were laborers or not, to indicate that they were oppressed by the economic conditions under which they worked. The “proletariat” was no longer a social caste, but a political party that had been inspired by Marx and had adapted his theories to their own purposes. This concept of the proletariat is revealed in the writings of the Commune. This concept was first used by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in 1841, but was never popularized until the publication of *The Communist Manifesto*.

The concept of the proletariat as a distinct social class that had been subdued by the bourgeois ownership of the means of productions (and of political power) both in France and in general can surely be attributed to Marx. Though Proudhon concerned himself with the welfare of the lower social classes, he did not see the proletariat as group that would serve as the ushers of a new society. Marx described Proudhon’s philosophy and approach to social injustices as marks of the petty-bourgeoisie, as they discouraged rebellion or revolution on the part of any one

social class. Proudhon sought political reform, not revolution, and he did not encourage any revolution that would have resembled the Paris Commune.

Marx's model of the proletariat was quickly adopted by the Communards and was often expressed in their literature. The term "workers" was most commonly used in revolutions prior to 1870, particularly during the Revolution of 1848, but by 1871 the term "proletariat" became synonymous with "the working class" and the two terms were used interchangeably. On March 20th, 1871, the Delegation of the *Journal Officiel* published a statement about the aims of their revolution and in it described the proletariat as they viewed it:

The workers, those who produce everything and who enjoy nothing, those who suffer from misery in the midst of the accumulated products, fruit of their labors and their sweat, must they have to be ceaselessly subjected to contempt? Will they never be allowed to work for their emancipation without raising against them a concert of curses?¹⁰⁴

This passage indicates that the Communards, and their leaders, had a Marxian idea of the proletariat in mind as they were shaping their revolution. They believed, as Marx did, that this class, who was responsible for production, shared in no profits, and been downtrodden by those classes that owned their labor and traded it as a commodity. The Delegation also points to the fact that the working class of France was "ceaselessly subjected to contempt." The Parisian working class had tried several times to take control of economic conditions in the months between the Siege of Paris and the establishment of the Commune. These calls for economic and

¹⁰⁴ Brunel, *Réimpression du Journal Officiel*, 17. "Les travailleurs, ceux qui produisent tout et qui ne jouissent de rien, ceux qui souffrent de la misère au milieu des produits accumulés, fruit de leur labeur et de leurs sueurs, devront-ils donc sans cesse être en butte à l'outrage? Ne leur sera-t-il jamais permis de travailler à leur émancipation sans soulever contre eux un concert de malédictions?"

social reform, and their attempted uprisings, were met with criticism and violent suppression. This downtrodden class, they believed, was finally achieving not only their own liberation but was at the forefront of a national effort toward social progress, which had been arrested during the reign on Napoleon III and the Franco-Prussian war:

May the few drops of blood shed, always regrettable, fall on the heads of the provocateurs of the civil war and the enemies of the people, who for nearly half a century have been the instigators of all our internal struggle and all our national ruins. The course of progress, interrupted for an instant, will resume its march, and the proletariat will accomplish, in spite of everything, its emancipation!¹⁰⁵

This working class was intending to lead their own revolution, not to gain authority within the existing political structures, as Proudhon had suggested. It is notable that the workers viewed their revolution as a “civil war.” In reality, there was very little violence in the establishment of the Commune, because Thiers’ armed forces had refused to fire on their French brothers in Paris. This article was published on March 20th, only two days after the insurrection, before any open fighting had commenced. The article indicates that bloodshed was anticipated and this rebellion would lead to an open war. This idea of open war between classes mirrors Marx’s analysis of historical social change and his predictions for the imminent proletariat revolution in *The Communist Manifesto*.¹⁰⁶ What the French workers considered their decades-long internal

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 17. “Que les quelques gouttes de sang versé, toujours regrettables, retombent sur la tête des provocateurs de la guerre civile et des ennemis du peuple, qui, depuis près d'un demi-siècle, ont été les auteurs de toutes nos luttes intestines et de toutes nos ruines nationales. Le cours du progrès, un instant interrompu, reprendra sa marche, et le prolétaire accomplira, malgré tout, son émancipation!”

¹⁰⁶ Kamenka, *The Portable Karl Marx*, 216. “...we traced the more or less veiled civil war, raging within existing society, up to the point where that war breaks out into open revolution, and where the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie lays the foundation for the sway of the proletariat.”

struggle had now reached a point that they considered to be war, as Marx had predicted, though no such war had yet broken out.

This proletariat, though it saw itself as downtrodden, also believed that it was the only class capable of ruling justly and honestly. They believed that the Napoleon III's loss to the Prussians was evidence that the bourgeoisie was neither virtuous, nor competent enough to preside over French government. But they saw themselves as the true patriots, the truly enlightened class, and the only class with the moral fiber to save France from foreign invasion and internal social and economic injustices. On March 26th, the *Journal Officiel* published a call for the Fifth Arrondissement residents to participate in upcoming elections for the Central Committee. In this call to vote, the provisional mayor wrote,

Voters of the Fifth District, you will prove by your vote that you associate yourself with that immense, newly discovered strength which results from the union of the National Guard Federation; You do not blame these young citizens whose energy, talent, honesty and daring fortitude have suddenly transformed a situation and conquered the old policy. The other classes, reducing the country to the saddest extremes, have now given the measure of their impotence and their obsolescence:—they have lost the right to call themselves the only classes of government. Allow honesty, work, justice—open the doors to the educated proletariat, to the true people, to the only class still pure of our faults and deceptions; to the only, finally, able to save the country.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Victor Brunel, *Réimpression du Journal Officiel*, 55. “Électeurs du cinquième arrondissement, vous prouvez par votre vote que vous vous associez à cette force immense, récemment révélée, qui résulte de l'union, de la fédération de la garde nationale; —que vous ne blâmez pas ces jeunes citoyens dont l'énergie, le talent, la probité et l'audace heureuse ont subitement transformé une situation et vaincu la vieille politique. Les autres classes, en réduisant le pays aux plus tristes extrémités, ont désormais donné la mesure de leur impuissance et de leur caducité:—elles ont perdu le droit de se dire les seules classes gouvernementales. Laissez arriver

Though they identified themselves as victims of the bourgeoisie, they believed that the fate of the republic and the nation rested on their shoulders, and that they were the only group with the virtues to save it. The bourgeoisie, on the other hand, which the workers believed had reduced France to mere ruins, was not only unworthy of the power that they had held in the past, but was losing its position of dominance and becoming “impotent.” This notion that the bourgeoisie was losing strength also echoes Marx’s claims made in *The Communist Manifesto*.¹⁰⁸

The sentiments of the Delegation of the *Journal Officiel* were echoed on May 7th in an article written by provincial members of the International. It restates the degradation that the proletariat in France had been forced to endure under the political might of the bourgeoisie, and celebrates the bravery of their Parisian comrades who began the revolution to end their economic and social circumstances, while reaffirming their solidarity in this international cause. They sign their letter to Paris with, “Vive la Commune de Paris! Vive la révolution des prolétaires!”¹⁰⁹, indicating that they do identify with Marx’s concept of the proletariat, and that they do believe that this proletariat will begin a revolution.¹¹⁰

Marx’s ideas of communism, though never explicitly named as such, were indeed present in the official communications of the Central Committee, though mixed with other popular socialist ideas. One notable Marxist concept that appears in Communard literature is the concept of two distinct social classes (the proletariat and the bourgeoisie) that are in hostile conflict with

l'honnêteté, le travail, la justice;—ouvrez les portes au prolétariat instruit, au vrai peuple, à la seule classe pure encore de nos fautes et de nos déchéances; à la seule, enfin, capable de sauver le pays.”

¹⁰⁸ Kamenka, *The Portable Karl Marx*, 217. “What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.”

¹⁰⁹ Brunel, *Réimpression du Journal Officiel*, 498.

¹¹⁰ Further examples of the Commune’s self-identification as the “proletariat” can be found in: Brunel, *Réimpression du Journal Officiel*, 16-17, 55, 168, 179, 324, 418-419, 491, 504, 649.

one another. Though Proudhon had highlighted the lack of freedom granted to the lower class by the upper-class controlled government, he never pitted these two groups against each other in his literature, and he laid the blame on the governmental system more than he did on the upper class itself. Proudhon supported the rights of the workers above all else, but he never clearly identified a social class as the aggressor that threatened the workers' rights. The Communards, however, did clearly identify the bourgeoisie as the owners of the means of production, the exploiters of the proletariat, and the enemy of the Commune. This model is one of the most definitive marks of Marx's economic theory and was very attractive to European workers. Proudhon was not an economist (at least not an economist on Marx's level), and he admitted this in an 1846 letter to Marx: "First, although my ideas in the matter of organization and realization are at this moment more or less settled, at least as regards principles, I believe it is my duty, as it is the duty of all socialists, to maintain for some time yet the critical or dubitative form; in short, I make profession in public of an almost absolute economic anti-dogmatism."¹¹¹ This stance was not nearly as helpful to the organizers of a new republic, nor was Proudhon's belief that violent revolution was unnecessary to the workers' cause.

Marx's system of opposition between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat appears throughout diverse publications in the *Journal Officiel*. On March 22nd, the *Journal Officiel* republished a flyer that had been printed by the trade union of tailors and stone-cutters on red paper and posted throughout the Hôtel-de-Ville quarter. The body of this flyer read,

The difficult times we are going through must have led us to serious reflections about our social position as workers. We must ask ourselves if we, producers, must continue to make those who produce nothing fruitful; if the system that we have followed so far is

¹¹¹ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon to Karl Marx, 1846.

destined to exist always, even though it is completely opposed to us ... So, workers, to work! because our patrons are only thinking at this moment of taking advantage of our misery to exploit us even more, if that is possible; and if we know how to get along, we will put a brake on their base rapacity.¹¹²

Marx's concept of a bourgeoisie that profits from the labor of the working class and a proletariat that is subjected only to misery is repeated in an article entitled "La Canaille" (The Scoundrel) submitted to the *Journal Officiel* and published on March 25th. The young author, a "republican of twenty years, whose father died in exile,"¹¹³ addressed the antagonism of French society against the Commune's revolutionaries by comparing these insurgents to those who fought for democracy in 1789, 1830, and 1848. He writes,

Bourgeois, acting, proprietor, who gave you the faculty to work for you, for you alone, to amass, to escape from misery, to make you a little well-being? Who works for you and enriches you? Scoundrel... It is she who makes the revolutions and without taking advantage of it. What does it earn, the rascal? Misery, hatred of those whom it serves, sometimes exile, often death. In spite of her benefits and her self-denial, you have only insult to her; you know very well that she is shooting thieves who slip into her ranks, and that if sometimes her hands are dyed with blood, it is because she punishes her traitors or

¹¹² Brunel, *Réimpression du Journal Officiel*, 37. "L'époque difficile que nous traversons doit nous avoir amenés à des réflexions sérieuses au sujet de notre position sociale comme travailleurs. Nous devons nous demander si nous, producteurs, nous devons continuer à faire vivre grassement ceux qui ne produisent rien; si le système que l'on a suivi jusqu'ici est destiné à exister toujours, alors même qu'il nous est complètement opposé...Donc, travailleurs, à l'ouvrage! car nos patrons ne songent en ce moment qu'à profiter de notre misère pour nous exploiter encore davantage, si cela est possible; et, si nous savons nous entendre, nous mettrons un frein à leurs basses rapacités."

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 44. "Un républicain de vingt ans, dont le père est mort en exil..."

avenges herself on an usurper. She disavows (sic) for you, and you have for her only the insult, the ingratitude to thank her.”¹¹⁴

This type of praise for the French revolutionary would not be uncommon among any class; even the bourgeoisie had a reverence for those who fought to end the monarchy, but this young author includes a description of the bourgeoisie as the oppressor of the revolutionaries and republicanism. He identified the revolutionaries as the defenders of the republic, and suggested that the bourgeoisie, by benefitting from their misery, was hampering political progress for a republic that they claimed to support. The bourgeoisie had prided itself on being the instigator of the first revolution in 1789 and the founder of the First Republic in France. It was the bourgeoisie that first fought an open war for social and economic reform. This young writer attempts to make the bourgeoisie feel ashamed for its treatment of the working class which only sought economic and social emancipation, as the bourgeoisie had.

He continues:

The bourgeoisie, their older sibling, who accomplished their emancipation more than three quarters of a century ago, who preceded them in the path of the revolution, do not they understand today that the turn of the emancipation of the proletariat is come?

Disasters and public calamities in which its political incapacity and its moral and intellectual decay have plunged France should yet to prove to it that it has finished its

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 44-45. “Bourgeois, commerçant, propriétaire, qui est-ce qui t'a donné la faculté de travailler pour toi, pour toi seul, d'amasser, de sortir de la misère, de te faire un petit bien-être? Qui est-ce qui travaille pour toi et t'enrichit? La canaille.... C'est elle qui fait les révolutions et sans en profiter. Qu'y gagne-t-elle, la canaille? La misère, la haine de ceux qu'elle sert, parfois l'exil, souvent la mort. Malgré ses bienfaits et son abnégation, vous n'avez pour elle que l'injure; vous savez bien qu'elle fusille les voleurs qui se glissent dans ses rangs, et que si parfois ses mains sont teintes de sang, c'est qu'elle punit ses traîtres ou se venge d'un usurpateur. Elle se désavoue (sic) pour vous, et vous n'avez pour elle que l'insulte, l'ingratitude pour la remercier.”

time, that it has accomplished the task imposed on it in 89, and that it must give way to the workers, at least let them come to social emancipation.¹¹⁵

In addition to shaming the bourgeoisie for denying to the workers the freedom from an oppressive and exploitative system which they themselves had claimed during their revolution against the aristocracy, the author claims that it was the working classes who fought in these revolutions on behalf of the bourgeoisie. He implied that the workers were owed a debt, but were met with hostility when they asked for the same liberties for which the bourgeoisie had fought and still claimed to represent.

On April 11th, a group of citizens published a call to arms and wrote, in reference to the international struggle of socialism, “this perpetual clash between the ruling classes and the people, does not indicate that the tree of freedom, fertilized by the waves of blood shed for centuries has finally borne fruit?”¹¹⁶ On April 19th, as the workers of Paris were celebrating one month of freedom from Thiers’ rule, the *Journal Officiel* published an article to mark the occasion beginning with the statement,

It was a month ago today that the people took back possession of their rights, that the worker, the proletarian, the instrument of the wealth of those who tried only to oppress them, broke in one strike all their ties and took from society the rank that was theirs. For

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 17. “La bourgeoisie, leur aînée, qui a accompli son émancipation il y a plus de trois quarts de siècle, qui les a précédés dans la voie de la révolution, ne comprend-elle pas aujourd'hui que le tour de l'émancipation du prolétariat est arrivé? Les désastres et les calamités publiques dans lesquels son incapacité politique et sa décrépitude morale et intellectuelle ont plongé la France devraient pourtant lui prouver qu'elle a fini son temps, qu'elle a accompli la tâche qui lui avait été imposée en 89, et qu'elle doit sinon céder la place aux travailleurs, au moins les laisser arriver à leur tour à l'émancipation sociale.”

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 225. “cet entrechoc perpétuel entre les classes régnautes et le peuple n'indique-t-il pas que l'arbre de la liberté, fécondé par les flots de sang versés durant des siècles a enfin porté ses fruits?”

the first time since the great Revolution, the people were not tricked by those in whom they had placed their trust and who had been charged with guarding their interests.¹¹⁷

By describing the proletariat as the “instrument of the wealth to those who sought only to oppress them,” the editor expresses this idea that one of the primary motivations of the Commune as to highlight this class conflict and to eradicate it. The Versailles government was not the only enemy that the Communards faced, unlike previous French revolutions when the governing body was the sole adversary. Thiers and his government was certainly a chief foe, but the bourgeoisie itself, under Thiers’ government or any other, was another antagonistic force that threatened social justice for the workers. The Communards viewed the bourgeoisie as the primary aggressors, with Thiers’ government supporting it. On April 26th, Charles Beslay published another article in the *Journal Officiel*, addressed to Thiers:

I was born, I lived, I went through life like you, in the world of the capitalist bourgeoisie, but, as a witness speaking before the eternal justice, I must declare that I have never seen in the government of capital, the institutions to break with the past, to fraternally hold hands to work! - Enslavement of work to capital! that is the foundation of your policy, and the day you saw the Republic of Labor sitting in the Hotel de Ville, you have been constantly shouting to France every day: ‘They are criminals!’¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 321. “Il y a aujourd’hui un mois que le peuple a repris possession de ses droits, que l’ouvrier, le prolétaire, instrument de la richesse de ceux qui ne cherchaient qu’à les opprimer, ont brisé d’un seul coup tous leurs liens et pris dans la société le rang qui leur revenait. Pour la première fois depuis la grande Révolution, le peuple n’a pas été trompé par ceux en qui il avait mise sa confiance et qu’il avait chargés de veiller à ses intérêts.”

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 390. “Je suis né, j’ai vécu, j’ai traversé la vie comme vous, dans le monde de la bourgeoisie capitaliste, mais, comme un témoin parlant devant la justice éternelle, je dois déclarer que je n’ai jamais vu dans le gouvernement du capital, les institutions rompre avec le passé, pour tendre fraternellement la main au travail! — Asservissement du travail au capital! tel est le fondement de votre politique et le jour où vous avez vu la République du travail siéger à l’Hôtel-de-Ville, vous n’avez cessé de crier chaque jour à la France: ‘Ce sont des criminels!’”

Beslay reiterates an idea that many other Communards had expressed: that the bourgeoisie was the exploiter of the working class, and because of this injustice, it was unfit to hold such a prominent place in French government. Labor and capital featured heavily in this article, as they featured as the primary theme in Marx's *Communist Manifesto*.

The Communards not only described the bourgeoisie as their natural social antagonists, but also as a class that was already in decline. Many articles published in the *Journal Officiel* described the weaknesses of the bourgeoisie in contrast with the strength that the workers had accumulated through their higher principles. On April 7th, an article published in the Journal claimed that, "It is useless to accumulate more arguments to show that history alone can give us an account of the political incapacity of the bourgeoisie, and show us the capacity of the working classes. The distinction of classes is the sure sign of conquest."¹¹⁹

This antagonism, in conjunction with the natural decline of the bourgeoisie, led the Communards to believe that the time for their revolution had come, despite Marx's warnings that they had not yet achieved a necessary level of organization. This time of revolution had arrived, not only because they believed that they had the will, social consciousness, and organization to reform the republic under socialist principles, but because the bourgeoisie itself was crumbling. On April 22nd, the *Journal Officiel* republished an article that had appeared in *La Liberté* in Brussels, addressing the fall of the bourgeoisie. As Marx had described the divisions among the bourgeoisie that signaled its imminent devastation¹²⁰ *La Liberté* stated that,

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 190. "Il est inutile d'accumuler plus d'arguments pour démontrer que l'histoire seule peut nous rendre compte de l'incapacité politique de la bourgeoisie, et nous démontrer la capacité des classes ouvrières. La distinction des classes est l'indice certain de la conquête."

¹²⁰ Kamenka, *The Portable Karl Marx*, 214. "But it ever rises up again, stronger, firmer, mightier. It compels legislative recognition of particular interests of the workers, by taking advantage of the divisions among the bourgeoisie itself."

In the bourgeoisie itself there is no resistant principle. Its individualistic selfishness has so disaggregated it that it is no longer even a body. It finds itself only to charge others with its defense. What would become of it in Germany if a feudal emperor did not protect it? where would it be in France, after two weeks, if Charette and Cathelineau had not flown to its rescue? The Vendée covering 89 is 89 who renounces and abdicates. And indeed, of the current crisis, what can come out, if not the old monarchical society, religious and feudal, or revolutionary socialism? Between these two worlds, the bourgeoisie has not even found a place to die with dignity¹²¹.

This weakened ruling social class, the Communards believed, not only deserved to be overtaken by a workers' revolution, but was not even prepared to defend its own position. Its existence relied others' protection. It had been safeguarded by monarchies. It had even been protected by the proletariat in the past. The same article continued,

While the entire bourgeoisie found neither an idea nor a resolution, and only succeeded in becoming conscious of itself in the brain of a decrepit old man; while his parliamentarism remained mute, his army disbanded, his abandoned flag did not find fifty bourgeois volunteers to defend it; while his frightened capitalist fled from it himself and did not

¹²¹ Brunel, *Réimpression du Journal Officiel*, 343. "Dans la bourgeoisie elle-même, il n'existe aucun principe résistant. Son égoïsme individualiste l'a si bien désagrégée, qu'elle n'est plus même un corps. Elle ne se retrouve que pour charger autrui de sa défense. Que deviendrait-elle en Allemagne, si un empereur féodal ne la protégeait? où serait-elle en France, au bout de deux semaines, si Charette et Cathelineau n'avaient volé à son secours? La Vendée couvrant 89, c'est 89 qui se renie et abdique. Et en effet, de la crise actuelle, qu'est-ce qui peut sortir, sinon l'ancienne société monarchique, religieuse et féodale, ou le socialisme révolutionnaire? Entre ces deux mondes, la bourgeoisie n'a pas même trouvé une place où mourir dignement."

bring to old Thiers the two or three millions that were necessary to bring back an army from Germany...”¹²²

This class, that the author described as more disorganized and more divided than the proletariat, was also unintelligent and lacked any concrete ideas. The author again references its loss of fortitude, claiming that not even its own people would be willing to defend it. It was this cowardice, he claims, that cost Thiers the war against Prussia. The bourgeoisie was neither prepared to defend its own existence, nor its own country. The claim that the bourgeoisie was responsible for the ruin of France and the belief that its own idleness, selfishness, and incompetence was leading to its impending collapse are key aspects of Marx’s interpretation of the contemporary bourgeoisie.

Paris had no lack of enemies. As French citizens, they faced the Prussians who had recently besieged the city and were still threatening occupation. The French government was seen as a threat for several reasons. French workers saw Thiers’ government as an extension of Napoleon III’s rule, and associated his government and policies with imperialism that threatened democracy. More importantly, Thiers had capitulated Paris to Prussia, which was seen by Paris as an act of treason. Both of these enemies were identified by journalists and the Central Committee, but neither was as threatening to the workers as their chief adversary, the bourgeoisie. The Marxist concept of this struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is

¹²² Ibid., 344. “Pendant que la bourgeoisie entière ne trouvait ni une idée ni une résolution, et n’a réussi à prendre conscience d’elle-même que dans le cerveau d’un vieillard décrépit; pendant que son parlementarisme restait muet, que son armée se débandait, que son drapeau abandonné ne trouvait pas cinquante bourgeois volontaires pour le défendre; pendant que son capitaliste effaré la fuyait lui-même et n’apportait pas au vieux Thiers les deux ou trois millions qu’il fallait pour faire revenir d’Allemagne une armée...”

seen again in the official publications in an April 11th letter submitted to the *Journal Officiel* by a group of citizens of the Commune:

To arms! The country is in danger! Is it the foreigner who returns to invade France? Are they the legions of tyrants of Europe in coalition together to massacre their brothers, hoping to destroy with the great city, until the memory of the immortal conquests that we have been buying from our blood for a century, and which the world calls liberty, equality, fraternity? ... No, these enemies, these assassins of the people and of liberty are French! ... This fratricidal vertigo that seizes France, this fight to the death, it is the final act of the eternal antagonism of right and of force, of labor and exploitation, of the people and their executioners! ... Our enemies, they are the privileged people of the current social order, all those who have always lived through our sweats who have always fattened themselves by our misery ... They saw the people get up and exclaim: 'No work without rights, no rights without work!' ... We want work, but to keep the product ... No more exploiters, no more masters!¹²³

These citizens address the fact that Prussia was waiting outside of their walls and that their own countrymen had betrayed them, but sought to identify one social class as their primary enemy: the French bourgeoisie.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 225. “Aux armes! La patrie est en danger!...Est-ce l'étranger qui revient envahir la France? Sont-ce les légions coalisées des tyrans de l'Europe qui massacrent nos frères, espérant détruire avec la grande cité, jusqu'au souvenir des conquêtes immortelles que depuis un siècle nous achetons de notre sang et que le monde nomme liberté, égalité, fraternité?... Non, ces ennemis, ces assassins du peuple et de la liberté sont des Français!... Ce vertige fratricide qui s'empare de la France, ce combat à mort, c'est l'acte final de l'éternel antagonisme du droit et de la force, du travail et de l'exploitation, du peuple et de ses bourreaux!... Nos ennemis, ce sont les privilégiés de l'ordre social actuel, tous ceux qui toujours ont vécu de nos sueurs, qui toujours se sont engraisés de notre misère... Ils ont vu le peuple se relever en s'écriant: 'Pas de devoirs sans droits, pas de droits sans devoirs!'...Nous voulons le travail, mais pour en garder le produit...Plus d'exploiteurs, plus de maitres!”

The notion of the importance of this class struggle outweighing the gravity of imminent invasion is present not only in the beliefs and writings of the revolutionary government. Workers also were aware that the liberation of the working class and their ability to enjoy the products of their labor was paramount to their cause. On May 1st, the General Controller of Railroads, Paul Pia, wrote a letter to the director of the *Journal Officiel* expressing this opinion:

The considerations which precede this decree exempt me from any commentary. I will only attempt to point out that it indicates on the part of the Commune the formal intention not to let itself be distracted, even by the grave preoccupations of the fight, of the application of the sovereign principles in virtue of which the worker, whatever he may be, worker, employee, peasant, must be in possession of all the integrality of his rights and the product of his labor.¹²⁴

This concerned citizen writes to express to the Central Committee his fear that their debates over administrative matters would distract them from the more urgent need to continue the workers' revolution. Pia barely concerns himself with the Versaillais and Prussian troops waiting to occupy Paris, and seemed to believe, as most of the Communards did, that the righteous nature of their cause was sufficient artillery to ward off the aggressors. But he was concerned with the workers' right to possess the benefits of their labor, as Marx had professed for decades.

The struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie sounds very similar between the conflict between the commoners and the bourgeoisie and the royalists in previous French

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 434. "Les considérants qui précèdent cet arrêté dispensent de me tout commentaire. Je m'attacherai seulement à faire ressortir qu'il indique de la part de la Commune l'intention formelle de ne pas se laisser distraire, même par les graves préoccupations de la lutte, de l'application des principes souverains en vertu desquels le travailleur, quel qu'il soit, ouvrier, employé, paysan, doit rentrer en possession de l'intégralité de ses droits et du produit de son travail."

revolutions, and the journalists of the Commune did draw attention to these similarities. The intentional comparisons highlight the similarities between their contemporary bourgeoisie and the feudal lords overthrown in the first French Revolution. This comparison likens the Communards to those who had been oppressed in France's past and justifies their cause as one of patriotism and equality. But though the bourgeoisie is depicted as the same type of ruling class: a corrupt group that had subdued middle classes and commoners through feudalism, the Communards present themselves as very different opponents to this injustice from their forefathers. Representations of the nineteenth century bourgeoisie as extensions of the eighteenth century aristocracy are ubiquitous in writings from the Commune, but the Communards never depicted themselves as commoners continuing the same struggle as those who overthrew the monarchy. The class struggle in this case was seen as very different. First, they were not overtaxed farmers and serfs who were burdened by a financial crisis. Instead, the self-identified proletariat were strong and able to not only defend themselves, but to support themselves financially. They did not seek to overthrow a government that held all power over their economic circumstances, but wished to create their own economic systems, independent of the government and the higher social classes. The proletariat had moved beyond the concept of the Social Contract that had inspired their revolutionary forbears, and sought to create and control their own economic, as well as governmental, structures. The time of the aristocracy was long past, and the bourgeoisie which took its place as the oppressive class through industrialization was now the target of the progressives who believed that they held enough power to create a new order.

In an April 7th article published in the *Journal Officiel*, titled "Une Révolution Populaire," the editor wrote,

The bourgeois revolutions have been, until this day, hit with incapacitation. They generously announced the best principles and the most revolutionary ideas; they did not know, they could not, or they did not want to realize them. Its egotism warned the bourgeoisie that the triumph of the doctrines proposed recklessly to the people, it would lose the benefit of the Revolution, and this profit, what was it? To replace, in its power, the caste that the people had helped to overturn? I do not say that this selfishness was reasoned, was voluntary; it was instinctive. Neither the virtues nor the extraordinary men have failed the bourgeoisie; but these revolutions, made pompously in the name of liberty, contained in themselves a contradictory principle, which demented them, and ended by destroying them. The Roman conception of imperial unity and centralization fatally obsesses the spirit of this class, which has never been able to free itself from it, and has obstinately continued to disregard its own interests and sacrifice them to the authority of a master.¹²⁵

L. X. De Ricard, who composed this piece for the journal, published this study of the history and politics of the bourgeoisie class in France. He blames not the men themselves who belong to this class for their failures. He even credited the previous bourgeois revolutions with

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 190. “Les révolutions bourgeoises ont été, jusqu'à ce jours, frappées d'incapacité. Elles ont généreusement annoncé les meilleurs principes et les idées les plus révolutionnaires; elles n'ont pas su, elles n'ont pas pu, ou elles n'ont pas voulu les réaliser. Son égoïsme a averti la bourgeoisie qu'au triomphe des doctrines proposées témérairement au peuple, elle perdrait le profit de la Révolution, et ce profit, quel était-il? De remplacer, dans sa puissance, la caste que le peuple l'avait aidé à renverser? Je ne dis pas que cet égoïsme fût raisonné, fût volontaire; il était instinctif. Ni les vertus, ni les hommes extraordinaires n'ont manqué à la bourgeoisie; mais ces révolutions, faites pompeusement au nom de la liberté, contenaient en elles-mêmes un principe contradictoire qui les démentait et devait finir par les détruire. La conception romaine de l'unité impériale et de la centralisation obsède fatalement l'esprit de cette classe, qui n'a jamais pu s'en affranchir, et s'y est obstinée jusqu'à méconnaître ses propres intérêts et à les sacrifier à l'autorité d'un maître.”

having “extraordinary men” and “virtues,” but believed that their desire to centralize power and have imperial unity corrupted their cause of liberty. What Communards, like De Ricard, saw in the bourgeois class was not an innately corrupt group of men, but a flawed belief system that led to a decline of economic and social freedom. In many ways, Communards saw the bourgeoisie as a contemporary form of aristocracy and saw themselves as the new oppressed class. This evolution is seemingly based on the model that,

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes,¹²⁶

as Marx presented in his *Communist Manifesto*. De Ricard even highlights Marx’s idea that the successes of the bourgeoisie have rested on international trade and imperialism, and states that these ambitions have “obsessed the spirit of this class.”¹²⁷

This notion is seen again in the *Journal Officiel* on March 29th:

That the partisans of the centralist, bourgeois republic, founded on the antagonism of the citizen and the state, of labor and of capital, of the middle class and of the plebian, that the formalists think about it: their utopia has always served as bridge to the monarchy; it is this which for a long time has killed, in France, the very idea of republic.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Kamenka, *The Portable Karl Marx*, 203-204.

¹²⁷ Brunel, *Réimpression du Journal Officiel*, 190.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 99. “Que les partisans de la République centraliste, bourgeoise, fondée sur l’antagonisme du citoyen et de l’Etat, du travail et du capital, de la classe moyenne et de la plèbe,

This article, submitted by editors of the paper, targets the bourgeoisie, not only as the enemy of the “middle class and the plebian,” but of the republic as well. On April 6th, the Central Committee published an article that told the Communards,

Workers, make no mistake: it is the great struggle, it is parasitism and work, exploitation and production, which are struggling. If you are tired of vegetating in ignorance and languishing in misery; if you want your children to be men who have the benefit of their labor, and not the kind of animals trained for the workshop or for combat, cultivating the fortune of an exploiter with their sweats ...be intelligent, stand!¹²⁹

These expressions of the working class oppressed by the bourgeoisie are ubiquitous in the *Journal Officiel* and this Marxian conceptualization of oppression is the defining characteristic of the relationship between these two classes.¹³⁰ And just had Marx had visualized a revolution for the working class, so did the Communards envisage a new republic with the proletariat in command. Though the concept of *égalité* appears throughout these journal articles, as it had appeared in all French revolutionary rhetoric, it was assumed that the Commune would bring authority to the working class alone. The Communards did not wish for a stronger voice in their representative bodies—they wanted to be the only voice. They believed that they would create a new society and would preside over it—just as Marx had claimed that the proletariat would overcome the bourgeoisie and be harbingers of a new society.

que les formalistes y réfléchissent: leur utopie a toujours servi de pont à la monarchie; c'est elle qui pendant longtemps a tué, en France, l'idée même de république.”

¹²⁹ Ibid., 184-185. “Travailleurs, ne vous y trompez pas: c'est la grande lutte, c'est le parasitisme et le travail, l'exploitation et la production, qui sont aux prises. Si vous êtes las de végéter dans l'ignorance et de croupir dans la misère; si vous voulez que vos enfants soient des hommes ayant le bénéfice de leur travail, et non des sortes d'animaux dressés pour l'atelier ou pour le combat, fécondant de leurs sueurs la fortune d'un exploiteur...soyez intelligents, debout!”

¹³⁰ More examples of the opposition between the bourgeoisie and the workers can be found in: Brunel, *Réimpression du Journal Officiel*, 324, 347, 381, 433, 434, 502, 547.

De Ricard also describes the important role that a study of history plays in contemporary politics. In addition to highlighting the role that the previous French revolutions have played in the shifts of social classes, he touches on the importance of studying history in the understanding of economics as well. Though economics was rarely discussed in the writings of the influential French socialists like Proudhon and Blanqui, and even less in Communal literature, De Ricard does mention the concepts of labor and capital in his article. He writes,

We shall see feudal society perish, like it, by the development of its own principle. The vassal and the lord, which are the two terms by which it is summed up, mark its end in the bondage of man and of the soil. How did it start? By the recommendation of the owner and the land. Finally, bourgeois society, which since 89 has substituted, in authority and privilege, the old aristocracy, against which it had allied with royalty, what is its principle? The subordination of labor to capital. It will be destroyed by the developed struggle of the worker against the capitalist.¹³¹

Marx was likely the influence behind his notion of economics, for no other socialist before this time had written any important piece of work that discusses “the subordination of labor to capital,” and these specific terms were almost never used by any other contemporary socialist thinker. Marx wrote in *The Communist Manifesto*: “The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn

¹³¹ Ibid., 189. “Nous verrons la société féodale périr, comme elle, par le développement de son propre principe. Le vassal et le seigneur, qui sont les deux termes où elle se résume, marquent sa fin dans le servage de l’homme et de la glèbe. Comment avait-elle commencé? Par la recommandation du possesseur et de la terre. Enfin la société bourgeoise, qui depuis 89 s’est substituée, dans l’autorité et dans le privilège, à l’ancienne aristocratie, contre laquelle elle s’était coalisée avec la royauté, quel est son principe? La subordination du travail au capital. Elle sera détruite par la lutte développée du travailleur contre le capitaliste.”

asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his “natural superiors,” and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous “cash payment.”¹³²

Though the Parisians were undoubtedly patriotic—even nationalistic—and were attempting only to reform their own nation, they believed that their proletarian cause was universal. The *Journal Officiel* often shared news from abroad, highlighting socialist movements throughout Europe. In these articles, the editors often referred to these socialists abroad as “nos frères”—a term typically reserved for their fellow Frenchmen. The Communards believed that these similar attempts of their “brother” socialists were indicative of an imminent universal socialist revolution. On April 11th, in an appeal to Parisians to continue the fight, a “group of citizens” wrote,

That same Germany, whose princely armies devastated our country, swearing death to its democratic and socialist trends, is itself shaken and worked by the revolutionary spirit! Also, for six months it has been in a state of siege, and its worker representatives are in the dungeon! Even Russia sees its defenders of liberty perish only to greet a new generation, ready to fight and die for the Republic and the social transformation!¹³³

These citizens continue with a list of countries whose socialist groups were intending to reform their own social and economic structures. They continue, “...does not this perpetual interplay

¹³² Kamenka, *The Portable Karl Marx*, 206.

¹³³ Brunel, *Réimpression du Journal Officiel*, 225. “Cette même Allemagne, — dont les armées princières dévastaient notre patrie, jurant la mort à ses tendances démocratiques et socialistes, — est elle-même ébranlée et travaillée par le souffle révolutionnaire! Aussi, depuis six mois est-elle en état de siège, et ses représentants ouvriers sont au cachot! La Russie même ne voit périr ses défenseurs de la liberté que pour saluer une génération nouvelle, à son tour prête à combattre et à mourir pour la République et la transformation sociale!”

between the ruling classes and the people indicate that the tree of freedom, fertilized by the streams of blood shed for centuries, has finally borne fruit?"¹³⁴, echoing Marx's concept that the subordinating and subordinated classes are in constant and eternal struggle and that begins on a national level and spreads internationally. This system of class struggle is described in *The Communist Manifesto*:

Though not in substance, yet in form, the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle. The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie. In depicting the most general phases of the development of the proletariat, we traced the more or less veiled civil war, raging within existing society, up to the point where that war breaks out into open revolution, and where the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie lays the foundation for the sway of the proletariat.¹³⁵

The April 11th article finishes with the phrase, "the cry of indignation of France and the world will complete what we have attempted!"¹³⁶, reinforcing the idea that France was leading what would become an international end to the antagonisms against the working class.

The idea that the time had come for the proletariat in Europe to begin an international revolution is echoed throughout the articles of the *Journal Officiel*, especially in articles concerning foreign news. On April 23rd, the journal reported that in Portugal,

¹³⁴ Ibid., 225. "...cet entrechoc perpétuel entre les classes régnautes et le peuple n'indique-t-il pas que l'arbre de la liberté, fécondé par les flots de sang versés durant des siècles a enfin porté ses fruits?"

¹³⁵ Kamenka, *The Portable Karl Marx*, 216.

¹³⁶ Brunel, *Réimpression du Journal Officiel*, 226. "le cri d'indignation de la France et du monde achèvera ce que nous aurons tenté!"

Two newspapers, *Reynold's New Paper* and the *Eastern Post* are the organs of the International. These papers are very common in the working class. Considerable sums are subscribed, and all means are used to confederate all the workers of Europe. 'Never,' adds the Lisbon newspaper, 'has the proletariat been so prepared to strike all that remains of feudal and monarchical.'¹³⁷

The concept of an international movement is seen in the journal again on April 26th:

Work? It is the great word of the new world that is rising, and this cry is now echoed in all civilized countries: in the United States, in England, in Russia, in Germany. Well, in the midst of these legitimate and incessant demands of the great family of workers, you have never known that you cling to the institutions which assure the preponderance of capital.¹³⁸

These reports contributed to their sense of the weight of their movement, and they felt a sense responsibility to continue their struggle on these foreign socialists' behalf. Though their city had been besieged by the Germans less than a year before, the French were particularly concerned with news from German socialist movements. There was no sense of bitterness in these articles toward the country that had ravaged their own, indicating that they truly did conceive of their revolution as an international one and saw the proletariat as a people without national divisions.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 364. "Deux journaux, le Reynold's New Paper et l'Eastern Post sont les organes de l'Internationale. Ces feuilles sont très-répandues dans la classe ouvrière. Des sommes considérables sont souscrites, et tous les moyens sont employés afin de confédérer tous les travailleurs de l'Europe. "Jamais, ajoute le journal de Lisbonne, le prolétariat ne s'est trouvé aussi préparé à frapper tout ce qui reste de féodale et de monarchique."

¹³⁸ Ibid., 390. "Le travail? C'est le grand mot du monde nouveau qui se lève, et ce cri trouve aujourd'hui des échos dans tous les pays civilisés: aux États-Unis, en Angleterre, en Russie, en Allemagne. Eh bien, au milieu de ces revendications légitimes et incessantes de la grande famille des travailleurs, vous n'avez jamais su que vous cramponner aux insitutions qui assurent la prépondérance du capital."

This attitude was a novel one for French revolutionaries and likely stemmed from the influence of the International, founded on Marx's own ideology.

To the Communards, the time for Marx's prophesied international revolution against the bourgeoisie had arrived, and distinctly from any other form of socialist uprising. Neither Blanqui's national revolution by means of espionage and a coup d'état, nor Proudhon's gradual incorporation of the working class into the representative bodies would fit the bill. It was Marx's idea of international organization, massive uprising, and rule of the working class that appealed to the Parisians.

Though this study does not focus on the role of religion in either the Commune or in Marx's ideology, the reflections of Marx's postulations about Christianity in Communard literature should not be overlooked. A large portion of the Communards were Catholic, but the more radical revolutionaries had a tendency to be atheist. This popular religious zeal within the working classes did not impede their efforts for secular education and society. Because the leaders of the Catholic Church often sympathized with the upper and middle classes, the proletariat in France felt betrayed by this institution as well. Their irreverence for religious authorities was clearly expressed by their assassination of priests held hostage in Paris and the pillaging and appropriation of churches, but secularism, though part of the Communard doctrine, was not of the highest priority. Communard secularism was, however, heavily influenced by Marx's own views of religion. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx describes the role that Christianity had played in his dialectical model of history and class struggle: "When the ancient world was in its last throes, the ancient religions were overcome by Christianity. When Christian ideas succumbed in the 18th century to rationalist ideas, feudal society fought its death battle with the then revolutionary bourgeoisie. The ideas of religious liberty and freedom of conscience

merely gave expression to the sway of free competition within the domain of knowledge.”¹³⁹

This idea is reiterated in the *Journal Officiel* on April 7th: “How did Christianity defeat pagan society? By replacing it. It began with the separation of the spiritual and the temporal, which is the universal desire of Christian society, and which will be its end.”¹⁴⁰ These religious views, which mirror those of Marx, appear throughout the *Journal Officiel*. Religion was another point of contention between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, and the church’s ties to the bourgeoisie deepened the divide between these classes.¹⁴¹

So how did these Marxian concepts of the proletariat and class struggle come into the purview of the revolutionary socialist in France? The links between Marx’s theories and the ideas expressed in Communard literature are not coincidental. There were several avenues by which the French socialist may have been exposed to Marxian ideas. It seems curious that every major historical work addressing the Paris Commune discusses—often at great length—the role that the First International Workingmen’s Association played in the formation of ideas and practices of the Communards, but does not address the role that Marx played in the founding the International. Every historian who has focused his study on Marx or the rise of Marxism *has* addressed the role that Marx played in founding the International. This discrepancy may be attributed to the fact that it would be extremely difficult to prove that the Communards who participated in the French branch of the International were Marxists or even casual followers of his ideas. By the time of the outbreak of the Commune, the International was splintered into

¹³⁹ Kamenka, *The Portable Karl Marx*, 225-226.

¹⁴⁰ Brunel, *Réimpression du Journal Officiel*, 189. “Comment le christianisme a-t-il vaincu la société païenne? En s’y substituant. Il a commencé par la séparation du spirituel et du temporel, qui est le désir universel de la société chrétienne, et qui sera sa fin.”

¹⁴¹ More examples of the Commune’s stances on religion can be found in: Brunel, *Réimpression du Journal Officiel*, 117, 129, 142, 253, 349, 537, 549, 562.

factions: those who followed Marx's ideas, those who more closely aligned themselves with Proudhon, and those who supported Bakunin. But by 1872, Marx was certainly the leading figure in the International. By the International's 1867 Congress of Brussels, Proudhon's ideas, which had won over not only the French socialists, but the majority of European socialists as well, were superseded by those of both Marx and Bakunin, with Marx's holding the highest rank of popularity.¹⁴²

Gogol states the important role that Marx played in founding and forming the International: "At the same time, the eight years (1864-1872) of the Workingmen's Association existence on the Europe continent were decisively shaped by Marx's intellectual/organizational participation."¹⁴³ It is especially hard to support a belief that Marx played no role in shaping the minds of the Paris International members, since it was the divorce between those Parisian International members who were followers of Marx and those who favored Proudhonism and anarchism that brought about the chapter's demise in 1872. Marx could hardly have had such a strong impact in less than a year, so it can be assumed that his teachings were adopted by many members prior to this branch's closing, and prior to the outbreak of the Commune.

Another important piece of evidence that illuminated Marx's role in both the Parisian branch of the International is his relationship and correspondence with Eugene Varlin. Varlin was head of the Paris International, and was elected to the Central Committee. He held eight different positions within the Central Committee and was undoubtedly one of the most influential leaders of the Commune. In the debates between Proudhon and Marx, Varlin took the side of Proudhon, but by 1871, had established a correspondence with Marx, that allowed the

¹⁴² Bernstein, "The Paris Commune," 33.

¹⁴³ Gogol, *Toward a Dialectic of Philosophy and Organization*, 60.

father of communism to advise the Central Committee. In a letter to Varlin and Leo Frankel¹⁴⁴, another Central Committee member and International member who would later serve as a leader of the International with Marx in London, Marx offers advice on the need for quick action against the Versailles, news of the Commune's reception abroad, and updates about the spread of socialism through the French provinces. The letter, dated May 13th, 1871, though it is the only surviving one, references other topics of conversation that must have been addressed in previous correspondence, and implies that Marx had been advising both of these two men in earlier days of the Commune.

Marx's ideas would also have filtered into the Central Committee members' beliefs through Blanquist organizations. Marx was very sympathetic to Blanqui's plight, and claimed that he was the leader that the Commune needed to succeed. Though Blanqui's ideas differed from Marx's far more than Proudhon's did, Marx admired his sense of urgency and his constant demand for action. Though there is no record of any correspondence between these men, there was certainly a relationship between Marx and two of Blanqui's most influential supporters: Charles Longuet and Paul Lafargue. Both of these men were Marx's sons-in-law. Though they were both more apprehensive about Blanqui's demand for conspiracy than some of his most fervent supporters, they sympathized with Blanqui's mission and supported him as a leader.¹⁴⁵ There is no discord in Lafargue's support of both Marx and Blanqui, since the two men were supportive of one another, but after the Commune, Blanqui's influence in France diminished

¹⁴⁴ R.D. Price, "Ideology and Motivation in the Paris Commune of the Paris Commune of 1871," *The Historical Journal* 15, no.1 (March 1972): 77. Price suggests that Frankel may have been a true Marxist at the time of the Commune.

¹⁴⁵ David A. Shafer, "Revolutionary insurgency and revolutionary republicanism: Aspects of the French Revolutionary tradition from the advent of the July monarchy through the repression of the Paris Commune." (PhD diss., University of London, University College London, 1994), 240.

rapidly, while Marx's was increasing swiftly. This was thanks, in no small part, to Paul Lafargue's efforts. Lafargue, who was active in the Bordeaux branch of the International, found himself in Paris during the reign of the Commune.

The French may also have been especially receptive to Marx's economic and social ideological concepts. French workers may have found Marx's conception of the contemporary bourgeoisie to be particularly relatable, because Marx had spent so much time observing French society. He had come of age during the French Revolution of 1789, had lived in Paris and met with Proudhon, and had observed the French proletariat growing conscious of itself from London. Though Marx had written *The Communist Manifesto* to address economic and social concerns internationally, he often references French history. One can see that Marx, and his *Communist Manifesto*, seem to be influenced by French history more than by the development of any other nation.

The Parisian Communards were certainly aware of Marx's ideas and the communist model through the activists that he had inspired abroad. The *Journal Officiel* often printed news from abroad when it was available and on April 18th, published a brief piece about Spain that reported on the condition of the Spanish branch of the International, "It supports above all not being a secret society, proclaims communist principles, demands solidarity with the foreign branches of the association, and makes a pressing appeal to the 'proletarians' awakening'."¹⁴⁶ Not only were other countries beginning to see the influences of Marx's observations on economic and social conditions, but they were seeing communist movements, as Marx had

¹⁴⁶ Brunel, *Réimpression du Journal Officiel*, 318. "Elle y soutient hautement ne pas être une société secrète, proclame les principes communistes, revendique la solidarité avec les branches étrangères de l'association, et fait un appel pressant au 'réveil des prolétaires'."

described in his *Communist Manifesto*, and France was aware of this “spectre haunting Europe.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ Kamenka, *The Portable Karl Marx*, 203.

Conclusion

This thesis' analysis of the posters, flyers, and newspapers produced by the Central Committee of the Paris Commune illuminates several important aspects of the political nature of the Paris Commune. These documents offer an insight into the internal processes of the governing body of the Commune and an insight into the political ideologies held by those elected. The ideas represented in these documents are diverse and occasionally contradictory—as were the ideologies of the represented officials. The *Journal Officiel*, in particular, is a substantial source that represents the objectives and motivations behind the thoughts and actions of the Central Committee.

To the present, no historian has conducted an in-depth analysis of these sources in any context, though they are significant documentary evidence which can illuminate a multitude of questions regarding the Commune's ambitions, internal and international dialogue, ideologies, and activity. The newspapers published by the Commune are particularly significant, because of the abundance of printings, and because they were very well-circulated, both within Paris and among the provinces. The publications of the Central Committee are representative of the collaboration among the elected members of the Central Committee, who were diverse in their ideologies, and represented both the heterogeneous individual neighborhoods of Paris and varied workers' associations. An analysis of the works printed by the Parisian workers, and the *Journal Officiel* shows the political nature of Paris' insurgence.

Most historians since the 1960s have claimed that the Commune was apolitical because of its lack of a unifying ideology, or because the workers of Paris were neither educated, nor organized enough to create a cohesive blueprint of what their proposed republic would look like. It has also

been asserted that the spontaneous nature of the outbreak of the Commune demonstrates a lack of political motive, as the Parisians commenced their revolution merely as a reaction to hostility from Versailles. This argument overlooks the principle reason for Versailles' intrusion—that Thiers knew that the Parisians were already planning a revolt. There were several instances of attempts to begin a revolution in Paris after the siege in 1870, and it was no secret that the Parisian workers were plotting another attempt after the elections in February 1871. The letters and newspaper articles of workers' syndicates show that they were planning this insurrection—with political motives—and had even determined when the revolt would take place. The Commune, for this reason, can not be considered spontaneous; Thiers had received notice of these plans and had acted preemptively, inciting immediate action from the Parisian Communards.

Others claim that, though the Parisian workers had socialist affiliations, the impetus for their uprising was more patriotic than political. Though patriotism, and even nationalism, is ubiquitous in the writings of the Commune, it is not the only, or even the most common theme that the Central Committee wished to present to the Communards. There is no question that the Parisians' patriotism led to a popular cry for a new republic and the end of Thiers' rule, which they viewed as an extension of the reign of Napoleon III. Scholars have claimed that the desire for a republic was the primary cause for the revolt, asserting that this ambition outweighed any political motive responsible for the Parisians' actions, but this aim of the Communards' to create a new government was itself political in nature. In addition to the cry for the establishment of a republic was the Commune's demand for social and economic reforms that would benefit the downtrodden working class. In this respect, the essence of the Commune was fundamentally political, but also specific in its objectives.

Though it is true that many Communards had differing and often incompatible ideologies and aspirations for their new government, the publications of the Central Committee demonstrate the elected authority's understanding of these complexities and commitment to reconciling all socialists of Paris under one government that would be popularly acceptable. Not only does the *Journal Officiel* demonstrate this ambition, but the newspaper itself served as a necessary instrument in the achievement of this unity and solidarity, as well as a means of encouragement to the Communards in their continuing struggle against the Versailles troops and in their efforts to build a stable society and economy for Paris.

An important question that arises in the examination of the ideological influences behind the Commune is the relationship between Karl Marx and Parisian leftist principles before the outbreak of the Commune. During and immediately after the fall of the Commune journalists in both England and America were quick to associate Marx's ideas and activity with socialist movements in France; and those opposed to the rebellion blamed Marx for the rebellion. The first histories of the Commune contributed to this perceived interconnection, as several significant histories were written by those who had either close relationship with Marx or with the International. Since the 1960s historians of the Commune have either eschewed addressing this connection, or they have denied that Marx had any influence on the Communard ideology. Marx is mentioned in every study of the Commune, but the trend has been to analyze the impact that the Commune had on Marx's intellectual development and not *vice versa*. While scholars do discuss the impact of French thinkers' works on the doctrines adopted by political clubs, unions, and associations (such as Proudhon's and Blanqui's), Marx's influence, which was once accepted as the primary source for the Communards' socialist ideals, is never discussed. No historian has explained why the idea that Marx's doctrines had directly influenced the Paris

Commune had disappeared from political analyses. It is difficult to conclusively prove an association between Marx and the Commune in most primary documents, because his name is never mentioned specifically in any of the official publications of the Commune as were Proudhon's and Blanqui's.

However, his impact on the French socialist mind can be found in newspapers and posters produced by the Commune's governing body. Marx's ideas would easily have reached the Parisian workers through his close association with the International, of which many French workers were members, and through the close connections that Marx shared with several prominent Parisian socialist activists who were later elected to leading roles in the Central Committee. Marx had written the founding documents for the International and his ideas became the platform for the organization. Specifically, Marx's specific conception of the proletariat and his model of class conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie are omnipresent in the Central Committee's publications.

Paris was undoubtedly as disorganized and divided as scholars claim, but the analysis of the official publications shows that after the Commune's establishment, great efforts were made to create a unified socialist society and a government to accommodate it. The rhetoric in the official documents was vague in its ambitions, as the Central Committee was still trying to appease the entire Parisian working class and had not had the time to put many reforms in place. Despite its nonspecificity, the Central Committee was resolved to create a new republic—one that was socialist and would allow the proletariat in Paris to have municipal authority, and these ambitions are pervasive in the relevant literature. The ideological influences, too, are difficult to distinguish, because there were many people and events that inspired the Communards, but the

presence of Marxist rhetoric and ideology is present, prevalent, and distinguishable in the official communications.

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