

I may be Karl Marx, but I am not a Marxist

About Prussian persecutions and the Paris Commune from 1871

#Marx #Germany #Paris #London

The city of Berlin owes much of its existence to the Huguenots, a religious group of French Protestants who were viciously persecuted by French Catholics in the 16th century. Around 1680, about 50,000 of them emigrated to Prussia and have left many architectural traces in the Berlin-Brandenburg region to this day.

History has it that some 200 years later, some of the descendants of these French Huguenots may have briefly returned to their roots to participate in the brutal suppression of one of the first successful political popular uprisings exactly 878.08 km away - in the French capital of Paris.

By 1870, the Second French Empire had completely collapsed and socialist movements, which had been steadily gaining power over the previous 40 years or so, were demanding a much more democratic republic in France. History tells us that during the so-called "Siege of Paris" in 1870, German and Prussian forces occupied parts of France and surrounded the city of Paris in what was supposed to be a purely military conflict. However, there is reason to believe that extreme conservative forces asked the German Emperor that his army invade their own country in order to save the many old monarchical ties that still existed between France and the rest of Europe in all the socialist power grabs. What happened in 1848, when a series of republican revolts against European monarchies had spread from Sicily to France and Germany, had to be prevented at all costs.

About to enter the French capital in early 1871, the German army began bombing the city heavily from January 5th. One would have expected Paris to be taken when the Germans were finally close. Instead, a strange peace deal was struck on January 26, 1871, when imperial French military leaders in Bordeaux, not Paris or Berlin, intervened and decided for themselves that the war had to end now. The Germans suddenly agreed not to occupy Paris. The French statesman and lawyer Jules Favre even went so far as to "persuade" the German Kaiser Bismarck not to disarm the National Guard. Remarkably, at the end of January 1871, Bismarck humbly declared that the French military must remain fully armed and intact *"in order to maintain public order"*.

The reason for this strange, sudden peace agreement between the invading German army on the one hand and the invasion ordering French on the other was revealed at almost the same moment in Paris - with far-reaching consequences to this day. The Second French Empire wasn't exactly known for loving its people. Life expectancy was low, ordinary people were once again dominated by an arrogant elite, exactly what the French Revolution had sought to radically change some 100 years earlier in 1789. The German invasion and the isolation of Paris during the extremely cold winter of 1870/71 made things worse, of course. People were starving, rats became a regular diet for many ordinary Parisians in early

1871.

When, on July 15th [1870], war [between France and Germany] was at last officially announced to the Corps Législatif, the whole opposition refused to vote the preliminary subsidies — even Thiers branded it as “detestable”; all the independent journals of Paris condemned it, and, wonderful to relate, the provincial press joined in almost unanimously.

General Council [statement of the](#) International Working Men’s Association, Karl Marx, June 1871

Shortly before the peace treaty with the German "invaders" from January 26, 1871, a first group of about 400 National Guardians gathered at noon on January 22, 1871, in front of the Hotel de Ville. They called for the entire military to be placed under civilian control and for the immediate election of a "Commune" in response to the catastrophic situation in Paris. Shootings broke out in the late afternoon, and several of these first Commune-ists were shot dead. The regular military closed down two publishing houses and arrested more than 80 revolutionaries.

Weeks later, a fight broke out over 400 obsolete cannons that had previously been financed by the Parisian public to be used against the Germans. The revolutionaries decided to place these cannons in the parks of working-class neighborhoods. The idea was to be able to defend oneself against the French national government, now that the war with the Germans was officially over. Things ignited on March 18, 1871, when a group of commune-ist soldiers managed to capture a number of cannons in Montmartre. The growing crowd of revolutionaries marched towards the Hotel de Ville, forcing the regular army and leadership to evacuate with 40,000 troops to Versailles - where they hid out for the next few months.

At that time, Bordeaux was the center of the French national government, not Paris any longer. Things were also critical for government "officials" there in Bordeaux. One of the largest squares in Europe, the Place de la Quinconces, still bears witness to this. The city center square in Bordeaux was once the site of the Cheateau de la Trompette. Around 1820, it was decided to turn all guns of the square inwards, not outwards, to prevent rebellion. Paris, meanwhile, became a counterforce with a renewed National Guard, which took control of the city after the regular military had fled. Its central committee declared on March 22, 1871 that it, and not the mayor, was the legitimate government of Paris. Elections were soon held, and on March 26, 1871, the newly elected "Commune" began its work with lots of enthusiasm.

The Commune-ists immediately issued one of their first decrees, declaring the separation of church and state. Several priests were arrested, churches were closed or converted, and the local archbishop was later executed in retaliation for similar acts from Versailles. Child labor was completely abolished, as was night work in bakeries. The Communards refused to distinguish between children born inside or outside of a marriage. The right of all children to a proper education was discussed, as was medical care for all. Pensions for unmarried national guardsmen and the children of those killed in action were legislated, as was the confiscation of businesses abandoned by their owners. The list of laws enacted for the benefit of ordinary people grew, so much so that the fugitive army and its leadership in Versailles soon called for help. Not necessarily from their own people, but from outside: the German Emperor. The

Prussians did not hesitate and ordered their armies to prepare for battle once again. Under the leadership of MacMahon, a native Irishman, the reinforced French army moved back into Paris in the Spring of 1871.

At the end of May 1871, the final battle between the Communards and the French army, known as Bloody Week, left tens of thousands dead. Outnumbered one to five, the Communards burned several Parisian palaces and monuments in retaliation. By October 1871, the Paris Commune had been crushed, its members and supporters executed, imprisoned, or sent to remote colonies such as New Caledonia.

A few years before and after the events of the Paris Commune, two of Germany's most famous sons, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, had published portions of their even more famous book, Das Kapital, in three installments: the first by Marx himself in 1865, the second by Friedrich Engels two years after Marx's death in 1883, and the third in 1894. Marx himself, of course, supported the Paris Commune, in part by coordinating support through and identifying with his "International Working Men Association" (IWMA).

The preliminary condition for the realisation of their treaty being the subjugation of Paris, they have asked Bismarck to postpone their payment of the first installment until after the occupation of Paris. Bismarck has accepted this condition. Prussia, being herself in very urgent need of this money, will therefore give the Versailles government every possible facility for hastening the occupation of Paris. So take care !

Karl Marx in a letter to Paris Communards [from May 13, 1871](#)

With the Prussian state ensuring that Karl Marx was persecuted wherever he went after his monarchy critical articles were published in Berlin in his early career, direct personal support for the Paris Communards was probably too risky for Marx. He left Germany in 1843, emigrating first to Paris, then to Brussels, then to London, where he and his family lived in such poverty in the slums of Soho that Marx lost one of his boys, who died at a very young age. It was only later that Friedrich Engels began to support Karl Marx regularly, providing him with a steady income from then on.

Shortly after 1871, Karl Marx wrote a book about the Paris Commune entitled "[The Civil War in France](#)". Lenin later studied this book in great detail, probably unaware that Marx had early distanced himself from the various political interpretations of his 1865 book, Das Kapital, by once declaring, "My name may be Karl Marx, but I am not a Marxist". Lenin was probably also not aware that Karl Marx [made some money as](#) a day trader.

Sort of like the Huguenots in Berlin, who might have told the Prussians: we may be from Paris, but we are not French.

<https://www.sun24.news/en/i-may-be-karl-marx-but-i-am-not-a-marxist-about-prussian-persecutions-and-the-paris-commune-from-1871.html>