

National Revival and Workers Liberation in the Polish Issue— The Differences Between Marx and Engels and Proudhonists During the First International

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In the international communist movement in the 19th century, the national uprising in Europe and the workers' movement were intertwined, forming a complex historical background. The Polish National Uprising in 1863 became a historical opportunity for the establishment of the First International. Although the unity of the British workers and the French workers was the realistic basis of the First International, the French workers showed a vague attitude different from the British workers on the Polish issue. In the first Congress of the First International, the French workers who almost are Proudhonists rejected the issue of supporting the Polish nation against the Tsar Russian oppression. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon did not link the Polish issue with the workers' movement, while he insisted that social and economic issues should not be confused with political reconstruction, and artificially separated national revival from workers' liberation. In order to promote and assist the establishment of the First International, Marx made certain consideration and concessions on national issues in the formulation of its declaration and constitution. Then Engels, commissioned by Marx, made some specific interpretations that they based on the difference between nation and nationality, and adhere it to the international national principle, both clearly shows the Marxism view of nation state, reveals the risk if international communist movement limited to the principle of nationalities, and also further reveals the importance to combine two great cause, national revival and workers liberation.

Keywords: Polish issue, national revival, worker liberation, the First International, Proudhonism

In the study of national question in the history of Marxist theory, it is necessary to pay attention to the national revival and independence and the international communist movement in the 19th century. In the process of the transformation of class struggle consciousness to practice, the resistance consciousness and action of the oppressed nations are also carried out in full swing. However, the complex relation and understanding of national revival and workers' liberation, in the international communist movement, especially during the International Men Workers' Association (known as the First International), are specifically embodied in the differences between Marxism and non-Marxism. Marx and Engels have always closely linked the liberation cause of the oppressed nation in Europe with the cause of the proletarian revolution, and take this principle as the purpose of the First International. However, in practice, this principle has attracted the opposition of other thoughts within the First International. These needs to be sorted out. This paper mainly focuses on the Polish national issue in the First International,

shows the differences between Marx and Engels and Proudhonists, and highlights the complex relation between national revival and workers' liberation, and its influence in the international communist movement.

1863 Polish National Uprising and the Founding of the First International

The direct cause of the founding of the First International in 1864 was the Polish National Uprising in 1863, which was the largest and most far-reaching national uprising against the Russian oppression in the modern Polish history. Modern Poland has suffered badly, and its national struggle has a long history. In the 19th century, the Polish National Uprising was the most frequent and intense, such as the Warsaw Uprising of 1830, the Krakow Uprising of 1846, the Poznan Uprising of 1848, and the Polish National Uprising of 1863. Although each uprising finally failed, but the Polish people's consciousness of national revival was constantly aroused.

Under the momentum of the Polish National Uprising which began in January 1863, the voice of the workers of the international communist movement sounded again after more than 10 years of silence. On July 22, 1863, London trade-union leaders held a mass meeting to support the national revival struggle of the Polish people. They also realized that in front of the powerful imperialist forces, the proletariat should unite, so the British workers' union workers began contact with France and other countries, and invited French workers to come to London to discuss the international workers' alliance.

On December 5, 1863, "British Workers to French Workers" was published in the official newspaper of the British Workers' Federation. At the beginning of this letter, the British workers expressed a firm attitude to the Polish issue:

Your visit delighted us when we hold a grand gathering to express our anger to the criminals who have brought disaster to the good and unfortunate Polish people for many years and humiliated them. This fills us with hope and allows us to see the more bright and happy future of Europe's bullied and despised nation. This visit could not have a better reason and a higher purpose except for the Polish cause. (Wang, 2013, p. 306)¹

The British workers' call was quickly echoed by the French workers. But from their reply, we can intuitively see the low importance of the Polish issue, with only a few words:

Poland is once again covered with bloody corpses; and we are the feeble witnesses of this tragic sight. When a nation is oppressed, the freedom of all other nations is in danger. In order to maintain his dignity, every free and eager person for freedom should help his oppressed brother. (Wang, 2013, p. 310)

This response is hard not to consider it polite. For in almost all the following space, the French workers talked on the three topics of "industrial progress, division of labor, and freedom of trade", and all were the familiar Proudhonist arguments that had long been criticized by Marx. In this regard, the British workers are sincerer and clear about Poland:

We advise you that our first joint effort will be for the freedom of Poland. The justice of the Polish cause requires that people do this, the obligation of the treaty requires people to do this, and the responsibility points the way for us. (Wang, 2013, p. 309)

This difference between British and French workers suggests that French workers (mostly Proudhonists) are more concerned about workers and their liberation, while the Polish issue only provides a historical opportunity for the unite of the workers' movement between Britain and France. Anyway, the willingness and sincerity of

¹ Quotations from this reference are translated by the author.

the British and French workers' organizations in the alliance impressed Marx: "I knew that on this occasion 'people who really count' were appearing, both from London and from Paris, and I therefore decided to waive my usual standing rule to decline any such invitations" (Marx & Engels, 1987, p. 16). Just the different statements of the workers of the two countries, or for the future debate of Marx and Engels facing Proudhonists, as well as the discussion within the First International and even the factional division, have left hidden dangers.

In September 1866, the First International held its first congress in Geneva; the Poland issue independent constitutes an issue to participate in discussion, namely "Necessity of annihilating Russian influence in Europe by implementing the right of nations to self-determination and restoring Poland on a democratic and social basis", which represents the disagreement between French and British workers. As shown in the current meeting minutes:

The French delegation said not to take any vote on this issue. The congress could only declare that it was against all states of any type of autocracy and would not discuss those complex issues involving nations. We should hope and demand that liberation in Russia, including in Poland, abandon the old politics of confrontation between people.

The British representative proposed a resolution in support of the Polish cause, saying that the Polish cause has always been sympathetic to the British people in democracy and intelligence. They pointed out that the first joint action of British and French workers was an expression of their dissatisfaction with the oppression of Poland, and that it was the first step towards the establishment of an international association. (Wang, 2013, p. 76)

A majority of the Congress were clearly inclined in favour of the French workers. In order not to veto this important issue, Marx and Engels' advocate John Philip Becker proposed a compromise that is always considered a blur of Polish national issues: "Given that all autocracy will die out with the development and consolidation of the international workers' association, the reconstruction of democracy and society will complete Poland on its own" (Wang, 2013, p. 41). This statement actually divides the mission of the First International and national revival. The reason for French workers rejecting the Polish issue is direct:

We advocate freedom, declare opposition to all autocracy, and strongly attack and object to the Russian autocratic social organization and trend of communism; however, we believe that, as delegates to the congress of an economic nature, we have nothing to say about the political reconstruction of Poland. (Wang, 2013, p. 111)

At that time, Marx was directly involved in the establishment of the First International, and especially undertook the task of drafting the Declaration and Program. However, after the founding of the First International, Marx soon had a debate over the Polish issue, between his old rivals—Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Proudhonists.

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Proudhonists on Polish Issue

The differences between Proudhon and Marx can be traced back to *The League of the Just*. We are more familiar with Marx's *The Poverty of Philosophy* to criticize Proudhon's *The Philosophy of Poverty*. However, after the reorganization of *The League of the Just* into *The Communist League*, the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, and the 1848 Revolution, Proudhon was not high in the study of the history of Marxism and the history of the international communist movement. In fact, in the workers' movement in Europe, the influence of Proudhon was great. Even in the First International, Proudhonism was still a strong non-Marxist ideology.

Proudhon died on January 19, 1865, and the fifth day later, Marx was invited to write *On Proudhon*, expressing his usual "tribute" to his old rival. Among them, Marx mentioned a work about Poland written by Proudhon:

His work on the *Coup d'etat*, in which he flirts with Louis Bonaparte and, in fact, strives to make him palatable to the workers, and his last work, written against *Poland*, in which for the greater glory of the tsar he expresses moronic cynicism,

must be described as works not merely bad but base, a baseness, however, which corresponds to the petty-bourgeois point of view. (Marx & Engels, 1985, p. 32)

This work titled *Si les traités de 1815 ont cessé d'exister? Actes du futur congrès*, which completed in 1862. Proudhon opposed revising the resolution of the 1815 Vienna Conference on Poland and opposing the European Democratic forces for the Polish national liberation. But it is worth noting that the work was not officially published at the time, and Marx probably knew it in some way (through French Proudhonists such as Tolain).²

Proudhon's works on the issue of Poland are written in terms of its own ideological development. In his 1861 book, *War and Peace*, he expounded his basic views on international relations, after which he turned to the specific issues of nationalism at the time. He realized the reactionary danger of nationalist movement, which danger was hidden in the nationalist tradition inherited from 1848, embodied in the national revival and liberation of Italy and Poland; he thought that "whose unification into large states was one of the cherished hopes of the Jacobins in France and their counterparts in other countries" (Woodcock, 1987, p. 238). These issues are already mentioned in *War and Peace*, and now Proudhon is eager to deal with them to expose the reactionary nature of nationalism and to free the French democracies of prejudice. "But, though it was completed during 1862, this work was never printed" (Woodcock, 1987, p. 239). Because Proudhon had his own concerns: First, he was very sensitive to the views of the revolutionary comrades at that time. When the Poland rose up in 1863, he decided not to publish the work not to appear that he was attacking the revolution in adversity; second, according to the George Woodcock, he also feared that the publication might affect his old friends (Alexander Herzen, Mikhail A. Bakunin³, etc.), "The manuscript is still in possession of his family, a monument to the seriousness with which he took the obligations of friendship" (Woodcock, 1987, p. 239).

Indeed, Proudhon did not see the significance of Poland national revival to workers' movement, but just prompted him to rethink the property:

What Proudhon does is to change his definition of property; when he now justifies it as the safeguard of liberty, he is thinking, not of the usurious property he condemned in his earlier works, but of the property that guarantees the independence of the peasant and the artisan. He raises a new antinomy—property versus the State. Property represents individualism, the State is the extreme negation of individual liberty, and Proudhon therefore seeks an adjustment of property which will help men to control their own destinies independently of the State. (Woodcock, 1987, p. 239)

Proudhon and Proudhonists' opposition on Polish revival may not be strange, because as French, to the revival and independence of relatively weak nation, they hold a powerful national oppressive and aggressive stance; it is direct to not too long but very profound history since the 1789 French Revolution. The nationalist sentiment in France began to rise from the French Revolution and after the Napoleonic Empire, and was further intensified by the suppression of the anti-French alliance. With the war between France and other European

² Marx was impressed with Tolain at first very well. In British workers and French workers decided to support the Polish national uprising agreed. Tolain led the French workers came to London: "For their part, the Parisians sent over a deputation headed by a worker named Tolain, who was the real workers' candidate in the last elections in Paris, a thoroughly nice fellow (His companions were quite nice lads, too)" (Marx & Engels, 1987, p. 15).

³ Bakunin fled Siberia in 1861 and participated in the Polish uprising in 1863, which won Marx's favor: "I saw him yesterday for the first time in 16 years. I must say I liked him very much, more so than previously. With regard to the Polish movement, he said the Russian government had needed the movement to keep Russia itself quiet, but had not counted on anything like an 18-month struggle. They had thus provoked the affair in Poland. Poland had been defeated by two things, the influence of Bonaparte and, secondly, the hesitation of collapse the Polish aristocracy in openly and unambiguously proclaiming peasant socialism from the outset. From now on—after the collapse of Poland affair—he (Bakunin) will only involve himself in the socialist movement" (Marx & Engels, 1987, pp. 18-19).

countries, as well as the deepening of domestic political unrest and social contradictions, the French national spirit and the nationalist sentiment of its people spread rapidly in an unprecedented situation. Especially during the period of the Second Empire in France, French nationalism was also in the historical process gradually to the extreme, then evolved into Chauvinism. In addition, France at that time was not willing to have a direct conflict with Tsarist Russia, because its main competitor was neighboring Prussia, which may indirectly lead to that Poland issue was not important to the Frenchmen. So in this sense, as a French, Proudhon is different from Marx. The liberation of Germany that Marx expected was based on the premise of the liberation of the nation under its oppression, rather than the imperial unification achieved through the war of Prussia's invasion of other nations (the subsequent unification of Germany followed the path that Marx opposed).

This difference continues to the First International, evolving into the different positions of the two sides on the Polish issue. If the "economic nature" and "political reconstruction" are an ambiguous excuse of French workers, the more practical excuse is that they are deeply concerned about the mixing of "national revival" with "workers' liberation". In 1866, for example, the French journalist Vésinier has publicly blame the General Committee of the First International: "They (the Committee) were charged with one of mankind's greatest concerns but are frivolously abandoning their lofty goal in order to degenerate *into a committee of nationalities in tow to Bonapartism*" (Marx & Engels, 1987, p. 216). This degradation is to defend Poland and oppose Russia. When large numbers of Poles demanded to join the First International General Council, French Proudhonists worried that the over-dominant Poles "will use *the Association* to help to restore their nationhood, without concerning themselves with the question of the emancipation of the workers" (Marx & Engels, 1987, p. 218).

Admittedly, this was a very real problem for the First International at that time. In fact, the majority support the French workers. The reason for this situation is still the theoretical difference in how to understand the national issues. In other words, people who hold the national position of Proudhonists have a vague understanding of "The working men have no country" (Marx & Engels, 1976, p. 502) in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, which is not only limited to the *nationality* principle, but also promotes the union of workers of all countries on the basis of the limited *national* principle. And the fundamental position of Marxism on national issues cannot leave without the differences between nation and nationality, this is an important contribution in Marxist national theory. It further explains the Internationalism which is the national principle of Marx and Engels.

The National Principle of Marx and Engels' Internationalism

In the face of the Polish National Uprising of 1863, Marx said: "The Polish business and Prussia's intervention do indeed represent a combination that impels us to speak" (Marx & Engels, 1983, p. 455). This "impels us to speak", prompted Marx to participate in a series of affairs in the founding of the First International. But we need to see that, because in different positions, Marx and Engels are in different states when dealing with Polish issue.

First of all, as a person entrusted by the First International to draft the *Address and Provisional Rules*, and to participate in the formulation of topics as a member of the General Council, Marx needed to take into account the overall situation when dealing with the Polish issues. As we all know, the founding of an international association of workers requires many consideration; the most basic problem is how to unite British workers and French workers, and in the name of the country is more practical and effective than the unity in the name of the nation.

For example, Marx wrote in the *Provisional Rules of the Association*:

That the emancipation of labour is neither a local nor a national, but a social problem, embracing all countries in which modern society exists, and depending for its solution on the concurrence, practical and theoretical, of the most advanced countries. (Marx & Engels, 1985, p. 14)

Proudhonists who focus on *social problem* clearly agree with this statement. In the *Inaugural Address of the Working Men's International Association*, Marx emphasized the national principle of the First International's foreign policy: "Insofar as international politics is mentioned in the 'Address', I refer to countries and not to nationalities, and denounce Russia, not the *minores gentium*" (Marx & Engels, 1987, p. 18).

At this time, Marx's consideration of the Polish national issues reflected his concessions for the establishment of the First International. However, the temporary concessions did not dispel Marx's continued concern about the Polish issue, and he was even once attracted by the kinship issue of nationality, which is also a major subject of ethnological anthropology now.

On June 24, 1865, Marx wrote to Engels: "*Ad vocem Poland*, I was most interested to read the work by *Elias Regnault* (the same who wrote the '*histoire des principautés danubiennes*'), '*La Question Européenne, faussement nommé La Question Polonaise*'" (Marx & Engels, 1987, p. 163).⁴ Marx sees from this work:

I see from it that Lapiński's dogma that the Great Russians are not Slavs has been advocated on linguistic, historical and ethnographical grounds in all seriousness by Monsieur Duchński (from Kiev, Professor in Paris); he maintains that the real Muscovites, i.e., inhabitants of the former grand duchy of Moscow, were for the most part Mongols or Finns, etc., as was the case in the parts of Russia situated further east and in its south-eastern parts. ... Result as obtained by Duchński: *Russia* is a name usurped by the Muscovites. They are not Slavs; they do not belong to the Indo-Germanic RACE at all, they are *des intrus*, who must be chased back across the Dnieper, etc. Panslavism in the Russian sense is a cabinet invention, etc. (Marx & Engels, 1987, pp. 163-164)

From the professional perspective of ethnology anthropology, Polish ethnologist Duchński challenged the so-called "principle of nationalities" in the continent, which provided a reference for the Polish issues that Marx was worried about. So Marx thought: "I wish that Duchński were right and at all events that this view would prevail among the Slavs" (Marx & Engels, 1987, p. 164). Five years later, Marx had a more rigorous view on this issue:

The Pole Duchński in Paris declared the Great Russian race to be Mongolian and not Slav, and attempted to prove this with a great expenditure of scholarship; and from the standpoint of a Pole, this in order. Even so, it is wrong. Not the Russian peasantry, but only the Russian aristocracy, is strongly mixed with Mongol-Tartar elements. (Marx & Engels, 1988, p. 435)

This also seems to indicate that Marx in his later years deeply absorbed and studied the knowledge of ethnology and anthropology around the world.

Look at Engels again. Engels was not directly involved in the establishment of the First International, but Marx corresponded well with him frequently, exchanging views. When Marx perceived the negative attitude of the Proudhonists towards the Polish issue, he asked Engels to clarify and express their views. It should be said that in Marx's friends at that time, Engels was the most suitable person to undertake this task. Engels was very sensitive to national issues and had a high awareness of them. This was confirmed both in his judgment of the Polish question in his youth and in his extensive reporting and commentary on the continental struggles for national liberation in 1848 (especially the Hungarian national liberation movement and the Slavic question) in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*. From January to April 1866, Engels wrote *What Have the Working Classes to Do*

⁴ It was Regnault's articles on Polish issue that directly prompted Proudhon's work on Poland: "Some articles on Poland by Elias Regnault in *La Presse* decided him to begin work on a book intended to expose finally the reactionary character of Polish nationalism and to wean the French democrats from their prejudices" (Woodcock, 1987, p. 239).

With Poland? These articles focus on principle of nationalities, and make a decisive distinction between nation and nationality.

Engels first reviewed the historical background of the revival and independence of the European nation at that time:

By the treaties of 1815 the boundaries of the various States of Europe were drawn merely to suit diplomatic convenience, and especially to suit the convenience of the then strongest continental Power—Russia. No account was taken either of the wishes, the interests, or the national diversities of the populations. Thus, Poland was divided, Germany was divided, Italy was divided, not to speak of the many smaller nationalities inhabiting south-eastern Europe, and of which few people at that time knew anything. The consequence was that for Poland, Germany, and Italy, the very first step in every political movement was to attempt the restoration of that national unity without which national life was but a shadow. (Marx & Engels, 1985, p. 155)

After the *coup d'état* of 1851, Louis Napoleon, the Emperor “by the grace of God and the national will”, had to find a democratised and popular-sounding name for his foreign policy. What could be better than to inscribe upon his banners the “principle of nationalities”? Every nationality to be the arbiter of its own fate—every detached fraction of any nationality to be allowed to annex itself to its great mother-country—what could be more liberal? Only, mark, there was not, now, any more question of *nations*, but of *nationalities*.” (Marx & Engels, 1985, p. 156)

Engels then illustrated the example of the unequal relationship between nation and nationality:

There is no country in Europe where there are not different nationalities under the same government. The Highland Gaels and the Welsh are undoubtedly of different nationalities to what the English are, although nobody will give to these remnants of peoples long gone by the title of nations, any more than to the Celtic inhabitants of Brittany in France. Moreover, no state boundary coincides with the natural boundary of nationality, that of language. (Marx & Engels, 1985, p. 156)

Moreover, the principle of nationalities advocated by France and Russia at that time was actually different from and avoided the national right:

Here, then, we perceive the difference between the “principle of *nationalities*” and the old democratic and working-class tenet as to the right of the great European *nations* to separate and independent existence. The “principle of nationalities” leaves entirely untouched the great question of the right of national existence for the historic peoples of Europe; nay, if it touches it, it is merely to disturb it. ... The European importance, the vitality of a people is as nothing in the eyes of the principle of nationalities. (Marx & Engels, 1985, p. 157)

As we can see from these statements of Engels, nation/peoples/state/country, which are based on political, demographic, or territorial, have a clear distinction from nationality, which is based on language, culture, or blood.⁵ Proudhonists are only limited to the principle of nationalities, and do not touch on revival and independence of nation or nation-state. And Marx and Engels supported Poland national revival, not as a nationality (divided is Poland nation rather than Poland nationality); they supported the Poland as nation revival, namely the revival and independence of Polish nation-state. It can accommodate four or even more different nationalities, as long as they identify Polish nation.

Marx and Engels' firm position on the national revival of Poland is a further interpretation of “The working men have no country” (Marx & Engels, 1976, p. 502) in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. According to the general understanding, “The working men have no country” refers to that the workers should regard the bourgeois country as the machine to oppress them, and the *country* here refers to the bourgeois nation-state, rather than the

⁵ Engels may have intended this series “in English”, but it is clear that this distinction brings trouble to the translation and understanding of Chinese, which is more likely to involve the differences in national understanding between China and the West.

nationalities in the sense of culture, lineage or language. After the victory of revolution, the proletariat will treat its nationalities like its comrades, and build this nation more sincerely than the bourgeoisie. "It is so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word" (Marx & Engels, 1976, p. 503); this means that the nation may exist legally for a long time, without even denying that the nation may continue to exist during the communist period. It can be seen that the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* neither advocated the proletariat's need to care about the national movement, nor that the proletariat adopted some nihilistic attitude on national issues. National nihilism leads to two possibilities: great nationalism, which defends the aggression and oppression of traditional great nations against other nations, and the other is extreme nationalism or local separatism, which makes the nation that already has a sense of unity in class struggle fragmented.

Marx and Engels' *Inter-national-ism* recognized the existence of the nation and the country. The unity was not born with the proletariat or modern working class, but needed the communists to try their best to explain, publicize, and fight for. The discussion on the Polish issues within the First International was only temporarily shelved after the adoption of a compromise resolution, but was not completely resolved. However, the subsequent effects caused by the Polish national uprising laid the stage for the later revolution in Russia, and created historical conditions for the eastward of the proletarian revolution. And unfortunately, the relationship between the national revival and the workers' movement not substantive solution, especially the national principle of internationalism, has not effective understanding, implementation, and execution in the international communist movement; this has also become the hidden trouble in Russia and the Soviet Union in the future. This shows that the revolutionary situation on the European continent in the 19th century did not develop exactly as Marx and Engels imagined, whether it was the proletarian revolution in the developed capitalist countries or the liberation movement of the oppressed nations.

Conclusion

As Marx said, "It was very difficult to frame the thing so that our view should appear in a form that would make it acceptable to the present outlook of the workers' movement" (Marx & Engels, 1987, p. 18). At that time, the workers' organizations in Europe did not awaken to this extent, that is, a scientific understanding of national revival and workers' liberation, which is a difference between Marx and Engels and those radical revolutionaries or reformist revolutionaries.

In the First International, the differences and disputes between Marx and Engels and Proudhonists mainly centered around the Polish issue. With the Engels' series articles and the compromise consensus within the First International, the temporary withdrawal of the Polish issue was basically announced. But obviously, it is impossible to completely dispel the influence of Proudhonism, but the history is pushing Marx and Engels forward. Because soon, in February-August 1867, the Fenian movement in Ireland exploded and quickly became the focus of the First International attention and discussion. If Polish issue did not fundamentally shake the First International workers' unity foundation, so, more difficult Ireland issue is directly make the differences between Marx and Engels and the British trade unionism. It is not only exposed the bourgeois chauvinistic trend of British trade unionism, but also mix national revival and workers' liberation with colonial rule and economic crisis, once affected the First International and the development of the international communist movement in future, is worth another discussion.

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