

*The Working-Class Peace Movement in Victorian England**

by E. W. SAGER**

The mid-Victorian decades were once seen as a tranquil interlude in the development of the British labour movement. In the classic interpretations of the Webbs and G. D. H. Cole, these were the decades when the working class fell prey to the values of the dominant capitalist class and opted to work within the existing order rather than to seek its overthrow. In recent years historians have re-examined the history of labour in the age of equipoise, and we now have a growing number of works dealing with mid-Victorian trade unions, working-class radicalism, socialism, and the labour aristocracy.¹ These works have revealed no abject surrender to middle-class domination, but a complex dialectic of conflict and accommodation between social classes at many levels of the nation's economic and political life. Our portrait of the mid-Victorian working man is now more complex though far from complete. In spite of the closer attention being paid to the working classes in this period, one of the most important political movements among working men in the third quarter of the century remains virtually unknown. This was a national movement with a far-reaching radical purpose: it demanded that the military institutions of the nation be reduced and eventually dismantled. At the head of this movement was the Workmen's Peace Association, the largest political organization supported and led by working men in the 1870s.

The working-class peace movement can tell us a great deal about the nature of pacifism itself, and about the trade union movement which bequeathed its pacifism to the Labour politicians of the early Twentieth Century. The peace movement suggests, first of all, that though mid-Victorian workers lost chartism's vision of a sweeping transformation of the social order, they did not forget the political aims or radical ideals of their chartist forbears. It is certainly true that the relative prosperity of the

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¹ The older interpretation may be found in Sydney and Beatrice WEBB, *The History of Trade Unionism* (London, 1920), chap. 4; G.D.H. Cole, *A Short History of the British Working-Class Movement* (London, 1948), pp. 144-167. Recent reassessments of the mid-Victorian period include Trygve THOLFSEN, *Working Class Radicalism in Mid-Victorian England* (London, 1976); Robert Q. GRAY, *The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh* (Oxford, 1976); Stan SHIPLEY, *Club Life and Socialism in Mid-Victorian London* (Oxford, 1972); Geoffrey CROSSICK, "The Labour Aristocracy and its Values," *Victorian Studies*, XX (1976); Caroline REID, "Middle-Class Values and Working Class Culture in 19th Century Sheffield," in *Essays in the Economic and Social History of South Yorkshire*, Sydney POLLARD and Colin HOLMES, eds. (Sheffield, 1977).

mid-Victorian period was accompanied by a renewed emphasis upon ameliorative social action and demands for trade union recognition. The working classes were increasingly involved in cooperative and friendly societies, institutions whose primary purpose was not political but social. Yet it is a mistake to see these developments leading to a corresponding decline in political activity.² The values cherished by the cooperative and friendly societies found political expression. Material independence, moral improvement, fellowship, and class solidarity all found expression in the radical pacifist's critique of political and military institutions. The peace movement was firmly rooted in the working-class culture, and its ideology owed nothing to the middle-class peace movement which flourished in the same decades.

When William Randal Cremer founded his Workmen's Peace Association in 1870, he and his followers carried radical banners which had survived through the age of equipoise.³ The pacifists' most immediate links were with the Reform League: most of the fifty original members of the Workmen's Peace Association had been agents or supporters of the Reform League in the 1860s. Many members of the Labour Representation League and of the Land and Labour League were also supporters of Cremer's peace movement.⁴ Through these organizations working-class radicals had indirect links with chartism: their campaigns for the suffrage, the ballot, redistribution, and land reform were part of a radical tradition dating from the 1840s and earlier. But there were even more direct links with chartism, since many of the pacifists of the early 1870s had been chartist leaders or had received their political education as chartists. Prominent among these were William Lovett, Henry Vincent, Arthur O'Neill, Benjamin Lucraft, Thomas Mottershead, A. A. Walton, Peter Shorrocks, and John Bedford Leno. Pacifists also had indirect links with chartist internationalism through the First International, whose campaign for international working-class brotherhood was part of a tradition which

² Cf. Royden HARRISON, *Before the Socialists* (London, 1965), pp. 6-7.

³ W. R. Cremer (1838-1908), Secretary of the Workmen's Peace Association, was a founder of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners; first English Secretary of the International Working Men's Association, 1864-66; member of the Reform League; MP for Haggerston, 1885-95 and 1900-8; founder of the Inter-Parliamentary Union; Nobel Peace Prize, 1903; Knighted, 1907; see the biography by Howard EVANS, *Sir Randal Cremer* (London, 1909).

⁴ Reform Leaguers included Edmond Beales (first President of the W.P.A.), J. Babbs, Benjamin Britten, Thomas Burt (President of the W.P.A. from 1877), Howard Evans, Joseph Leicester, Victor Le Lubez, John Bedford Leno, Benjamin Lucraft, P. McDonnell, J. D. Marks, Thomas Mottershead, J. D. Nieass, George Odger, J. Osborne, W. D. Stainsby, A. A. Walton, John Weston, William C. Worley. Labour Representation Leaguers: G. Boon, J. Galbraith, Daniel Guile, B. Lucraft, C. Matkin, Thomas Mottershead, J. D. Nieass, George Odger, J. Osborne, Thomas Patterson, T.C. Potto, James Rowland, G. Savage, Marcus Sinclair, W. D. Stainsby, A. A. Walton; Henry Broadhurst, John Hales and John Kane were occasional W.P.A. supporters. Land and Labour League: John Hales, Victor Le Lubez, Thomas Mottershead, J. Osborne, A. A. Walton. See Howard EVANS, *Cremer*, p. 82. A list of 667 agents and supporters of the W.P.A. appears in my "Pacifism and the Victorians; A Social History of the English Peace Movement" (Ph.D. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1975), Appendix II.

began with the Fraternal Democrats. Eight members of the General Council of the First International became members of the Council of the Workmen's Peace Association, and several other members of the International later supported Cremer's organization.⁵

The Workmen's Peace Association mounted a campaign against conscription which echoed chartist protests against the threatened revival of the Militia in 1846. W. P. A. resolutions against military service might have been heard at any meeting of the chartists' National Anti-Militia Association:⁶

this meeting enters its emphatic protest against any extension of our military system, especially against any kind of compulsory military service, the meeting being firmly convinced that large fighting forces are not only provocative of war rather than preservative of peace, but that their existence is incompatible with the liberties of the people.

The Arbitrator, the journal of the W.P.A., hailed "the man who drew up the Charter" as "the truest and purest among working class leaders," and quoted passages from Lovett's early addresses in which the chartist had urged international arbitration as a solution to war.⁷ In their own condemnation of war, the pacifists of the 1870s included demands for political rights which remind us not of the middle-class Peace Society, but of chartism. "We tell the war-making aristocracy that so long as we are denied the rights of citizenship, so long as we have no stake in the land of our birth, we don't intend to be drafted 3,000 miles from our home to defend a rotten barbarous government."⁸ The pacifists of the 1870s celebrated other democratic battles of the past: they remembered Peterloo, the Cracow Republic, Kossuth, Garibaldi, Mazzini, and the international tyranny of the Holy Alliance. Speaking in the name of "those upon whose labour each State depends for its very existence," the first address of the W.P.A. reiterated the slogans of democratic internationalism: "The interest of the working classes throughout the civilized world is one and the same. We have nothing to do with dynastic jealousies or rivalries, court intrigues, secret treaties, diplomatic squabbles, and balances of power. We care for none of these things."⁹

⁵ The eight were Cremer, Lucraft, Mottershead, F. J. Lassassie, Dixon Stainsby, J. Osborne, William Worley and J. D. Nicass. On the internationalist tradition in the 1850s see A. Muller Lehning, "The International Association (1855-1859): A contribution to the Preliminary History of the First International," *International Review for Social History*, 111 (1938): 185-286.

⁶ *Arbitrator*, February 1875, p. 4.

⁷ *Arbitrator*, August 1877, p. 3. The *Arbitrator* first appeared in 1871. So far as I know the only complete collection of this journal's editions is contained in the Nobel Institute, Oslo; the University of London Library in Senate House has most issues for 1876, 1877 and 1878; the British Library of Political and Economic Science has a fairly complete collection beginning in 1886. The journal was still appearing in the 1960s.

⁸ Joseph Arch quoted in *The English Labourer*, 23 December 1976.

⁹ *Herald of Peace*, September 1870, pp. 161-2; see also the *Arbitrator*, July 1872, p. 3; August 1875, p. 11; and Mottershead's historical reminiscence in the *Arbitrator*, November 1872, Supplement.

The Workmen's Peace Association did not forget the chartists' condemnation of commercial monopolies and of the "mercenary capitalists" who profited from war. The W.P.A. supporters read in their journal that commercial greed had been responsible for the Alabama crisis during the American Civil War; they read that corn merchants had profited from higher prices during war; and they knew that economic interests had put many employers on the side of oppression and slavery in the American Civil War. They knew that "the soldier always follows the trader."¹⁰ The bondholder in the Eastern Crisis was Cobbett's fundholder resurrected, the arch-villain "in a system that enables the middle class to live in luxury, although they never soil their hands with a day's toil."¹¹ The W.P.A. had not forgotten the class enemies of the Fraternal Democrats, nor had it surrendered to a middle-class interpretation of working-class interests.

Anti-war protest was a receptacle for the radical nostrums of the past, and a popular means of pledging faith with the independence and integrity of one's social class. But in pacifism the celebration of past victories had become almost an end in itself. The W.P.A. did not question the legitimacy of the social and political order. It brought to the foreground one of chartism's secondary aims, and attacked the weapons of privilege rather than privilege itself. In pacifism the rhetoric of chartism had lost its ideological force. This ideological reversal was not an automatic result of mid-Victorian prosperity. Of course the relative improvement in incomes for many workers, and the creation of a labour aristocracy, were of crucial importance in the liberalization of working-class politics. But prosperity alone did not determine the direction of working-class politics. Religious and cultural influences also encouraged many workers to adopt reformist ideals, and these influences often preceded mid-Victorian prosperity.¹²

The pacifist worker had learned in childhood that literacy and knowledge were essential tools in the class struggle. To preserve his dignity in a hostile world, the worker hoarded his meagre knowledge as though it were accumulated property. The founders of the W.P.A. had gained their first smattering of knowledge, not through chartism, but in schools and institutions provided by the employing classes. Like many pacifists, William Randal Cremer received his first education from a domineering and pious mother, and he learned to read in a Wesleyan school. Howard Evans, Cremer's right-hand man, learned his first lessons from his father's reading of Milton and Bunyan, and he went to a Nonconformist school. Thomas Burt, President of the W.P.A. from 1877, was a Primitive Methodist whose religion reinforced his dedication to "a more Christian industrial system." Francis Soutter went to a British and Foreign School, and his

¹⁰ *Arbitrator*, March 1872, pp. 2-3; July 1874, p. 7; September 1874, p. 5. See EVANS, *Cremer*, p. 99 for Cremer's attack on "mercenary capitalists" during the Eastern Crisis; and see the *Arbitrator*, February 1878, p. 1 on corn merchants who profit by war.

¹¹ *The Republican*, 1 January 1871, p. 1.

¹² On some of these religious and cultural influences see Trygve THOLFSEN, "The Intellectual Origins of Mid-Victorian Stability," *Political Science Quarterly* vol. 86 (March 1971): 57-91.

political education began at the Saturday evening newspaper readings of the pacifist Rev. George Mollett Murphy.¹³ Cremer, Benjamin Lucraft, Thomas Mottershead, Magee Pratt, and Benjamin Britten — leading members of the W.P.A. Council — urged the National Education League to support Bible reading in schools. Mottershead, while still a member of the First International, put religion before politics in the education of the young: the Bible, he believed, was “the grandest book that could possibly be put in the hands of a child.”¹⁴

Sunday schools and day schools were part of the formative experience of a large number of working-class children. The historian of pacifism cannot afford to ignore these schools, for it was through such institutions that the non-violent ethics of Protestantism were transmitted to the working class culture.¹⁵ Though it is impossible to measure precisely the influence of these schools, it is worth noting that educators were neither un-subtle nor inflexible in their methods. The Gradgrinds and Thwackums of Dickens’ and Fielding’s fancy were certainly mythical figures by the 1840s. Nonconformist teachers in particular had been converted to liberal methods in education by the 1840s: the teacher must lead his pupils in “willing captivity,” said a leading pacifist who was Secretary of the British and Foreign Schools Society; children’s minds, he asserted, are engaged only when their interest and pleasure are aroused.¹⁶ Nonconformist and Anglican schools gradually withdrew Scriptural catechism in favour of more appealing secular stories which carefully incorporated the desired moral lesson. Though it is impossible to summarize briefly the content of a vast body of children’s literature, one general point must be made here about the educational experience of the working-class child.

An analysis of 150 school readers in use in the early Victorian decades bears out the findings of other researchers in the field.¹⁷ School texts and readers before the 1870s did not use military heroes to inculcate the lessons of heroic struggle and patriotism. Nor did they introduce children to the complexities of political economy. Instead children read stories in which sin and virtue were apotheosized in contrasting images of pain and suffering on the one hand, and kindness, meekness, and joy on

¹³ Howard EVANS, *Sir Randal Cremer*, p. 20; Howard EVANS, *Radical Fights of Forty Years* (London, 1913); Thomas Burt, *An Autobiography* (London, 1924), p. 10; F. W. SOUTTER, *Recollections of a Labour Pioneer* (London, 1923), pp. 15-16; *The Autobiography of Joseph Arch* (Fitzroy Edition, London, 1966), p. 28.

¹⁴ *Beehive*, 18 June 1870, p. 277.

¹⁵ On the working class acceptance of Sunday schools see Thomas W. LAQUEUR, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture* (Yale, 1976).

¹⁶ Henry DUNN, *Popular Education; or, The Normal School Manual* (London, 1837), p. 13; see also British and Foreign Schools Society, *Manual of the System of Primary Instruction* (London, 1831), p. 11.

¹⁷ J. M. GOLDSTROM, “The Changing Social Content of Elementary Education as Reflected in School Books in Use in England, 1808-1870” (Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham, 1968); GOLDSTROM, *The Social Content of Education, 1808-1870* (Shannon, 1972); Valerie E. CHANCELLOR, *History for their Masters: Opinion in the English History Textbook: 1800-1914* (Bath, 197). A more complete discussion of pacifism in education appears in chapter seven of my “Pacifism and the Victorians”.

the other. On the side of virtue we find a world of sweetness and light, in which families dwell in comfort, the soft answer turns away wrath, and a vast menagerie of birds and animals appeal to humane feelings. In the world of virtue the wolf is subdued by kindness and the song of a lark quells a revolution.¹⁸ In one of the most common stories which children read in the early Victorian period, the child-hero proves his bravery by refusing to fight the school bully. Thomas Hughes' story, in which the hero fights the bully, was a reaction against the prevailing Nonconformist homily.¹⁹

At the same time the child learned of the "evils of our Social System." Those evils were a terrifying hydra of violence, suffering, and death. Violence and death appear as earthly punishments for sin, especially the sins of anger and jealousy. Examples of the obsession with these anti-social vices could be multiplied hundreds of times. In the world of sin, murder follows from angry thoughts, and boys are torn to pieces by bears for speaking disrespectfully.²⁰ Descriptions of "mutilated corpses," "shattered limbs," dead mothers and the horrors of war are followed by appeals for brotherly love.²¹ Death was not only a punishment for sin, but a stimulus to humane feelings and Christ-like sensibility. Here is a typical passage from the popular "lesson outlines" of the Nonconformists Henry Dunn and John Crossley:²²

War — greatest of social evils, — destroys fruits of earth — demoralizes;
— battles excite worst passions — occasion immense destruction of life —
blood — pain — misery... Cultivate spirit of gospel — regard mankind as one
family — treat all men justly — assist all — love all.

The exhortations against violence in all forms were not occasional features of school literature, but one of its central themes. The working-class child learned of a world polarized into extremes of violence and brotherly love. It is little wonder that in later life the working-class radical should acclaim his own non-violence as proof of his moral and political respectability; and it is little wonder that the worker should claim the same purity for the means by which he would win political rights: "Wisdom, justice, gentleness, love — these are to be the all-conquering weapons of the reformer."²³

¹⁸ Mrs. HOWARD, *Poetry for Home and Day Schools* (n.d.), pp. 15-16; Henry DUNN and John CROSSELEY, *Daily Lesson Books*, II (1840s), p. 18; *The Child's Companion* (1866), pp. 154-58.

¹⁹ The story appears in sources too numerous to mention, but see DUNN and CROSSELEY, *Daily Lesson Books*, II, p. 50; *Sunday School Gleanings* (London, 1823), p. 61; *The Baptist Sunday School Magazine* (1865), p. 13; *Sunday School Penny Magazine* (Manchester District Sunday School Association, 1867), pp. 181-83; *Primitive Methodist Juvenile Magazine* (1870), pp. 89-92, 116-17; *Sunday Scholars' Annual* (London, 1868), pp. 51-52. Hughes' reaction appears in *Tom Brown's School Days*.

²⁰ CHRISTIAN BROTHERS OF IRELAND, *The First Book of Reading Lessons* (Dublin, 1841), p. 41; *The Second Book of Reading Lessons* (Dublin, 1842), pp. 166-6.

²¹ A particularly gruesome passage appears in John Bowring's *Minor Morals* (London, 1834), pp. 129-31; see also the publications of S.W. Partridge, and almost any issue of the *Baptist Picture Magazine*.

²² DUNN and CROSSELEY, *Daily Lesson Books*, III, p. 187.

²³ Thomas BURT, *An Autobiography*, p. 10.

At the same time the working-class radical could use his Sunday school lessons to rebuke the "nations called Christian" for believing war to be "compatible with the name they boast."²⁴

I showed how kings, in all ages, had enslaved the people, and spilt their blood in wars of conquest, thus violating the precept "Thou shalt do no murder" ...I described our own guilty Colonial rule, and still guiltier rule of Ireland... I showed how the immense taxation we were forced to endure had entailed indescribable suffering on millions; and that thus had been violated the precept "Thou shalt do not murder".

In defence of his pride and independence as a working man, the worker had entered the schools of his employers, and had suffused the radical heritage with the non-violent teachings of a Protestant culture.

The defence of class pride required more than the ability to read and write. The first requisite of individual dignity was material independence. Thrift was not a moral lesson learned from Samuel Smiles; it was a lesson learned from the experience of subsistence standards of living, an experience which many pacifists had known in their youth in the 1830s and 1840s. When in later life a victory over poverty had been won, the achievement sanctified the moral lessons of youth. The victory had been won, not by the generosity of the employing classes, nor by the benevolent workings of the economic system, but by personal effort, thrift, moral stringency, and dedicated accumulation. Here then is the real effect of small gains in real wages in the mid-Victorian period: by eradicating the worst extremes of distress for many workers, prosperity allowed class pride the very moral and material vindication which it had sought. Sanctified by experience, the lessons of self-help and independence even permeated working men's thinking about collective action. "Combine, cooperate in manly independence, that is the main thing; help yourself, and help others, that is the main point; the machinery will then take care of itself."²⁵ Political principles merged with moral imperatives learned in the struggle for personal dignity and independence.

In opposing conscription and war, the worker celebrated his moral victory and fought to protect his meagre accumulation of worldly goods. The values of thrift, accumulation, education, moral improvement, and personal independence merged completely in anti-war protest:²⁶

Think of the loss of the wages, the loss of liberty, the loss of higher education, and the loss of home influences. Think of the immorality of barrack life, the liability to foreign service in deadly climates, the slavish subordination of the soldier to his officer...

The "stern morals" of material necessity declared that waste was the cardinal sin, and these same morals guided the pacifist in his attack on war: "A survey of the dreadful scene under the grave light of stern morals

²⁴ Thomas COOPER, *The Life of Thomas Cooper* (London, 1872), pp. 187-188; *Beehive*, 30 August 1870, p. 410.

²⁵ Joseph ARCH, *The Story of My Life* (London, 1898), p. 405.

²⁶ From a W.P.A. address cited in the *Herald of Peace*, July 1875, p. 260.

is deserving of attention. How disastrously it [war] disturbs commerce! What criminal waste of treasure, what destruction of realized property, what wreck of civilization."²⁷

The fear of material loss and moral defeat no less than the expectation of further gains directed the course of radical politics in the 1870s. Although gains in real wages were made in this period, those who gained did not forget how quickly their wages could be threatened if trade stagnated or prices rose. And even the self-improved worker did not count on the generosity of his employer to see him through hard times. Fidelity to self-taught ideals allowed neither servile acquiescence nor a sweeping rejection of the economic system in which a stake had been claimed. The source of any threats to material well-being must therefore lie in some evil outside the working man's control and beyond the economic system. War was that evil. In war the traditional class enemies gathered to threaten one's meagre savings and to squander the revenue which taxes had squeezed from generations of working men. War raised prices, disrupted trade, and caused unemployment. The experience of many workers in time of war gave this argument some plausibility. Joseph Arch often told of the hardship caused by high bread prices during the Crimean War.²⁸ Others spoke of the distress caused by the cotton famine during the American Civil War.²⁹ When the Franco-Prussian War came, it seemed only to confirm that war was the principal threat to the independence of working men.

At the beginning of the Franco-Prussian War the *Beehive* reported consternation in trade circles. As early as July the working man was reading that panic gripped the Liverpool Stock Exchange and the cotton industry, that the iron and the shipping industries were stagnating, and that the wool trade in Yorkshire was paralyzed.³⁰ The *Beehive* further predicted that the coal trade with France and Prussia would soon cease. By November the newspaper was reporting that the panic had "found its way into nearly all departments of finance and commerce."³¹ Assuming from past experience that war would damage industry and threaten wages, Bolton cotton spinners withdrew a wage claim partly "in consequence of the effects of the Franco-Prussian War upon trade..."³² In August the bankruptcy of James Threlfall and Son, the Preston cotton manufacturers, seemed to confirm the *Beehive's* fears. On August 27th the *Beehive* reported that the agitation for higher wages in Lancashire "seems to have died out generally, in the face of the disheartening prospect induced by the Franco-Prussian War." Of course the *Beehive* had greatly exaggerated the effect of the war. But both London and Lancashire workers had learned the lessons of war too well to notice any encouraging signs. The fear remained in 1872, when the Workmen's Peace Association founded

²⁷ *Beehive*, 13 August 1870, p. 410.

²⁸ *Arbitrator*, February 1875, p. 4.

²⁹ *Arbitrator*, March 1875, p. 6.

³⁰ *Beehive*, 30 July 1870, p. 371.

³¹ *Beehive*, 5 November 1870, p. 587; 14 January 1871, pp. 4-5.

³² *Beehive*, 6 August 1870, p. 387.

its first regional department in Lancashire where many agreed with the General Secretary of the Iron Shipbuilders: "war paralyses trade and commerce, and no class of working men knew this better than those he was connected with."³³

By 1870 iron workers seem to have learned the pacifist economic lesson as thoroughly as any occupational group. During the Franco-Prussian War the absence of continental competition, and sustained domestic and American demand, more than made up for the fall in continental trade. But at the outset of the war the *Beehive* reported fears of stagnation in the iron industry in Middlesborough, Sheffield, Wolverhampton, Birmingham, and Newport, and in the tin trade in Staffordshire and Cornwall.³⁴ On August 20th there appeared an address by "the working men of Keighley," a centre of machine-tool manufacturing. They condemned war as "the curse of mankind... a grim phantom whose lust for human woe, and thirst for human blood, is unquenchable."³⁵ In 1873 iron workers and engineers were the most numerous working-class groups to petition Parliament in support of Henry Richard's motion on international arbitration. Petitions came from the Iron-workers' National Association and from local ironworkers' associations in twenty towns.³⁶

By August of 1870 the *Beehive* concluded that the war in Europe had produced "a concussion in our social atmosphere from the effects of which it will take months, it may be years, to recover."³⁷ It was during this panic that William Randal Cremer, Edmond Beales, and other Reform Leaguers formed the Workmen's Peace Committee, which later became the Workmen's Peace Association. Their object was to condemn "the enormous mischief of standing armies in general, and the frightful evils caused by all war to industry, commerce, and civilisation..."³⁸ Cremer and his friends were not alone in taking up this pacifist defence of the worker's right to uninterrupted material accumulation. In July the Labour Representation League issued its first address on the war, which declared that "those who live by their toil require peace, that intelligence may be promoted by education, and that prosperity and happiness may flow from an uninterrupted pursuit of their industrial occupations."³⁹

The lesson of the Franco-Prussian War was not soon forgotten, and pacifist economic analysis gradually found wide support in the Trades Union Congress. The idea that was a principal cause of the trade depression of the 1870s became a truism among T.U.C. leaders. Daniel Guile, General Secretary of the Iron Founders and a member of the W.P.A. Council, argued in the Ironfounders Society Annual Report for 1877 that

³³ *Arbitrator*, December 1872, p. 4.

³⁴ *Beehive*, 30 July 1870, p. 371; 6 August 1870, p. 387; 20 August 1870, p. 418.

³⁵ *Beehive*, 20 August 1870, p. 422.

³⁶ See the Twenty-Third to Twenty-Sixth Reports of the Select Committee on Public Petitions (1871-73), Journals of the House of Lords, House of Lords Record Office.

³⁷ *Beehive*, 13 August 1870, p. 410.

³⁸ *Beehive*, 23 July 1870, p. 360, reporting a meeting held on 22 July.

³⁹ *Beehive*, 30 July 1870, p. 371.

“Trade had been depressed and bad from the commencement [of 1877]; war and bloodshed have been rife in the world. Although England has been preserved in peace, yet, to a very lamentable extent, we have felt its evil influence....”⁴⁰ Daniel Gibson, a member of the W.P.A. Committee in Edinburgh and President of the T.U.C., explained the depression to the Trades Union Congress of 1871:⁴¹

the real cause is to be found in the withdrawal of millions of men from the ranks of productive industry, and imposing upon the people the Herculean tasks of supporting armies of idlers... When we reflect that every man who ceases to earn his own living has to be supported by the labours of others, and that in Europe there are not less than 5,000,000 of men who have to be thus sustained, the economic folly will be at once apparent... No reasonable doubt exists that the commercial distress [in the U.S.A.] has been mainly owing to the gigantic war through which that country passed a few years ago...

By 1881 imperial wars had become the principal restraint upon industry, as Edwin Coulson told the T.U.C. These wars “do untold injury to the poor and to the working classes... by increasing the instability of industry and employment.”⁴² The themes of depression and unemployment recur throughout the speeches at trade union conferences protesting against intervention in the Eastern Crisis in 1878.

The counter-arguments to pacifist economic analysis carried little weight in the trade union movement. The pacifist had a ready answer to the argument that reducing the armed forces would create an enormous surplus in the labour market, thereby lowering wages to the sole benefit of employers. “It was a mistake”, said Cremer, “to fancy that keeping thousands of men in idleness benefitted the labour market. Every man who ceases to labour imposes an additional share on those who do toil, and somebody has to labour to provide his wants.”⁴³ The suggestion that the middle-class “peace at any price” party was motivated by a desire to create a surplus labour market was too rarely heard to invite rebuttal.⁴⁴ In 1871 George Eccarius offered the clearest argument against pacifists economics. He cited trade figures to show that in spite of England’s military expenditure nations less heavily taxed had not driven the English from world markets. Eccarius’ answer to the W.P.A.’s question “Do you wish to increase our load of taxation and the National Debt?” was clear enough: “Yes if needs be, particularly the property and income tax, and make it progressive.”⁴⁵ Eccarius said that the W.P.A. had identified the wrong enemies of the working class and found the wrong solution to economic inequality.

⁴⁰ *Industrial Review*, 12 January 1878, p. 2; and see the Ironfounders’ Monthly Report in the *Arbitrator*, June 1885, p. 2.

⁴¹ *Report of the Twelfth Annual Trades Union Congress* (Edinburgh, 1879), p. 13.

⁴² *Report of the Fourteenth Annual Trades Union Congress* (London, 1881), p. 14. See also *Arbitrator*, April 1878 for the W.P.A. Conference of 10 April 1878.

⁴³ Cremer was speaking at the W.P.A. Conference in Bristol, 2 March 1874: *Arbitrator*, March 1874, pp. 4-5. See also the report of the W.P.A. Leicester Conference of 1877 in *Herald of Peace*, May 1877, p. 234.

⁴⁴ The argument appears in *The Republican*, 1 October 1870, p. 1.

⁴⁵ *National Reformer*, 22 January 1871, p. 60.

But the W.P.A. had no difficulty in answering Eccarius. The W.P.A. also believed in progressive taxation: those merchants and aristocrats who profited from government expenditure should pay for the services of government. The idea that public debt and prosperity were compatible was an "absurdity," said the W.P.A., because the public debt merely increased the profits of a class of financial speculators. The taxation required to meet the interest on the national debt "is so much capital abstracted annually from industry." Therefore "this extra taxation is the annual transfer of industrial profit from the labour market to the money market." The "haughty capitalist" thus appropriated the fruits of labour from its rightful owners, the producers themselves.⁴⁶ This argument assumes that if employers were less heavily taxed they would pay higher wages. However untenable this assumption might be, the W.P.A. was nevertheless answering Eccarius in his own terms and agreeing that capitalists stole the product of labour from workers. The pacifists' conspiracy theory, which held that war was the work of an influential clique of financial speculators, could sound very much like a labour theory of value. The pacifist theory was convincing because its premise was a moral lesson drawn from the workers' own social and economic experience. The lessons of thrift and independence taught that indebtedness to others was a mark of "permanent poverty" and "disgrace." The economics of war followed from this basic postulate of class pride and independence: "The morality of debt, whether in an individual or a nation, is precisely the same...."⁴⁷

Pacifism was a unique form of political opportunism which allowed working-class reformers to adopt the rhetoric of both democratic and socialist revolutionaries. Nowhere in the history of nineteenth-century peace movements is the flexibility of pacifism more clearly demonstrated than in the links between the First International and the Workmen's Peace Association. The W.P.A. found support among those whom the International sought to convert, and it did so partly because pacifism could so easily incorporate the rhetoric of socialist internationalism while robbing internationalism of its ideological force. In the few years between the founding of the International and the founding of the W.P.A., the priorities of working-class internationalism were reversed. Political and social emancipation, said the International, was the prerequisite to universal peace. Peace, said the W.P.A., was the essential condition of liberty and social justice. The different priorities are clear enough in retrospect, but in the 1860s there were few who noticed the difference.⁴⁸

The confusion began in the International itself. From the beginning the English members were more interested in questions of foreign policy than in the economics of Marx. Cremer, Odger, Howell, and other founding members of the International had recently supported the Garibaldi Fund Committee and the National League for the Independence of Poland.

⁴⁶ *Arbitrator*, January 1873, p. 6.

⁴⁷ *Arbitrator*, January 1873, p. 6.

⁴⁸ "Peace precedes rather than grows out of liberty" said Cremer: *Arbitrator*, July 1876, p. 10.

The International provided another platform from which to proclaim "the achievements of the Italian liberators, when led by one of their own class."⁴⁹ From the beginning Marx had to counteract this celebration of libertarian and Mazzinian ideals. But even in his Inaugural Address he was forced to make concessions to the internationalist priorities of the English. "No rights without duties, no duties without rights," he wrote. And he made at least one statement which could be confused with pacifism:⁵⁰

If the emancipation of the working classes requires their fraternal concurrence, how are they to fulfil that great mission with a foreign policy in pursuit of criminal designs, playing upon national prejudices, and squandering in piratical wars the people's blood and treasure?

The International allowed the English radical to take vicarious pleasure in the exploits of continental liberators while pursuing his own political emancipation by more peaceful methods. And in spite of Marx's own efforts to keep the International independent of bourgeois internationalism, the central assumption of pacifism crept into the addresses of the International on more than one occasion. "Vindicate the simple laws of morals and justice, which ought to govern the relations of private individuals, as the laws paramount of the intercourse of nations."

The confusion between pacifism and socialist internationalism deepened in the late 1860s. At a meeting of 4 June 1867, the General Council of the International considered a letter from Henry Richard, Secretary of the middle-class Peace Society. Richard urged the International to adopt addresses "expressing sympathy with the French and German working men." The General Council, with Marx absent, did not dismiss Richard's suggestion, and even considered the idea of cooperation with the Peace Society. They acknowledge Richard's letter and asked "for further information concerning the principles of the Peace Society, with a view to cooperate with them for the furtherance of the cause of international peace."⁵¹ The Congress of the International at Lausanne adopted a declaration on war which was almost identical to later statements by the W.P.A. The Congress declared⁵²

That the burden of war is borne mainly by the working class, in as much as war does not only deprive the workers of the means of subsistence, but compels them to shed one another's blood; That armed peace paralyses the forces of production, asks of the workers nothing but useless labour, and scares production by the perpetual threat of war; That peace, since it is the first requisite of well-being, must be consolidated by a new order of things which shall no longer recognise in society the existence of two classes, one of which is exploited by the other.

⁴⁹ See Odger's address read at the founding meeting of the International: *Beehive*, 3 September 1864, p. 4.

⁵⁰ Karl MARX and F. ENGELS, *Selected Works*, English edition (Moscow, 1951), vol. I, pp. 348-49. George Howell testifies to his own and Cremer's pursuit of Marx, whom Howell saw as a humanitarian zealot: F. M. LEVENTHAL, *Respectable Radical: George Howell and Victorian Working Class Politics* (London, 1971), p. 21.

⁵¹ *The General Council of the First International 1866-1868: Minutes* (Moscow, n.d.), p. 127, meeting of 4 June 1867.

⁵² Cited in R. Palme DUTT, *The Internationale* (London, 1964), p. 69.

The ambiguity here is complete. Was peace the first requisite, or a new social order?

Marx opposed any cooperation with such middle-class organizations as the League of Peace and Liberty, and his view prevailed. But the International continued to give high priority to its own anti-war position. War was the first item on the agenda at the Brussels Congress in 1868. The Congress declared that "the chief and persistent cause of war is a lack of economic equilibrium." Here was a step in the direction of a socialist explanation for war, but it did not contradict the pacifist theory that war was the result of a lack of equilibrium between working men and unscrupulous capitalist conspirators. The Brussels Congress then qualified its hint at a socialist explanation for war, and its qualification was even more in line with English thinking:⁵³

nevertheless an auxiliary cause of war is the arbitrary use of force which results from centralisation and despotism; That therefore the peoples can henceforward lessen the frequency of war by opposing those who make war or declare war; That this right belongs especially to the working classes....

The declaration concluded by calling for a general strike in the event of war, and for a "war of peoples against war."

The First International had declared the prevention of war to be one of its first priorities. It is little wonder that the Peace Society regarded the International as a potential ally.⁵⁴ It is even less surprising that so many later pacifists remained in the International after Cremer left. These included Applegarth, Lucraft, Mottershead, W. Dixon Stansby, F. J. Lassassie, A. A. Walton, William Worley, John Hales, William Owen of Hanley, William Gilliver of Birmingham, Edward Jones of Manchester, and Henri Tolain. Edmond Beales, the first President of the W.P.A., had also applied for membership in the International but had been rejected because of his manifestly bourgeois background.⁵⁵ Lucraft and Odger resigned from the International rather than sign Marx's defence of the Commune in 1871, but Mottershead and Hales did sign the most revolutionary statement of the First International. Edward Jones, F. Kupper, and J. S. Murchie were agents of the fragmented International when they attended the W.P.A. Conference in Manchester in December 1872.⁵⁶

The leaders of the W.P.A. saw no essential difference between the original aims of the International and the aims of the W.P.A. They saw only that the International had been distracted from its purposes by foreigners. Cremer was replaced as General Secretary of the International in 1866, but he did not lose interest in peace or in the International. In

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁵⁴ See the letter by Arthur O'Neill, Peace Society agent, to the I.W.M.A.: *First International 1870-1871: Minutes* (Moscow), pp. 67-68, meeting of 11 October 1870.

⁵⁵ Tolain was made an honorary agent of the W.P.A. in 1873; see my "Pacifism and the Victorians," Appendix II. On Beales' application see Henry COLLINS and Chimen ABRAMSKY, *Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement* (London, 1965), p. 64.

⁵⁶ *Arbitrator*, December 1872, p. 4.

1867 he founded an English branch of the French League of Peace and Liberty and he urged the League to cooperate with the International. In 1869 we find Cremer urging the T.U.C. to call on all trade unions to affiliate with the International. His motion urged that the International would serve the economic interests of labour and "would also conduce to lasting peace between the nations."⁵⁷ As late as 1870 we find Cremer discussing the purposes of the International with the Land and Labour League.⁵⁸ Finally Cremer accepted that the International had lost sight of what he called "practical capabilities." As Howard Evans tells us:⁵⁹

The old International which has so far departed from its original ideas of fraternity was now practically dead; the idea of its English Secretary, Cremer, was to create a new International which should conform more to the original purpose of the old one.

In 1874 Cremer hoped that "the Workmen's Peace Association contains the nucleus of the future International..."⁶⁰

The end of socialist internationalism came during and immediately after the Franco-Prussian War. We have been told that the war brought to the surface the traditional republican sympathies of English labour, created a larger working-class audience for the Positivists, and briefly enlarged the International.⁶¹ In 1870 all these things did happen. But none of these trends was inconsistent with the emerging pacifism of labour leaders. The war left the International in political confusion, and led to the founding of the Workmen's Peace Association, an organization which neither Marx nor the Positivists nor the Republicans could influence. The following reinterpretation of labour's reaction to the war suggests how pervasive the pacifist influence had become by 1870.

The London Reform Leaguers and trade unionists were virtually unanimous in supporting the French Republic against the Prussian invader.⁶² They did not support the new Republic merely because they espoused republican principles against dynastic rule; they supported it because they had come to identify their own welfare with peace and the uninterrupted flow of trade, and so they vested their hopes in a republic which promised peace and free trade. They opposed Prussian militarism because it raised the spectre of a war of revenge by France, and prolonged disruption of trade. The calls for armed intervention on behalf of

⁵⁷ COLLINS and ABRAMSKY, p. 96.

⁵⁸ *The Republican*, 1 November 1870, p. 6.

⁵⁹ Howard EVANS, *Cremer*, p. 88.

⁶⁰ *Arbitrator*, September 1874, p. 3.

⁶¹ See Royden HARRISON, *Before the Socialists*, p. 231; Collins and Abramsky see in the pro-French fervour "the traditional working class and radical policy of support for republics and opposition to 'Holy Alliances'": *Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement*, p. 182.

⁶² The initial reaction was divided, and many blamed Napoleon III for provoking the Germans; but during the summer and autumn sympathy for France increased. German sympathizers often saw French militarism as the greater evil: for instance, James YEATES, *The Franco-German War: A Letter to Mr. George Odger and the French Sympathizers among the Working Classes by one of Their Own Order* (London, March 1871).

France came from the Positivists and from the remnant of democratic internationalism in the Anglo-French Intervention Committee, not from the majority of French sympathizers. Many of those who supported intervention did so in the hope of establishing permanent peace in Europe. The French cause was not the rallying cry of republicanism but of the new liberal politics: it was a war to end all war.

It was the threatened dismemberment of France which first engaged the sympathies of English labour on the French side, not the proclamation of the Republic on 4 September. Labour leaders accepted Marx's prediction that dismemberment would lead to a war of revenge. On 3 September the *Beehive* reported a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Labour Representation League which had taken place a few days previously. Members of the Committee protested against "any dismemberment of France" because⁶³

if such a course were allowed now, it would lead to interminable complications and troubles, from which England, in common with other nations interested, would ultimately suffer. Were Prussia to be threatened with dismemberment by France... they should feel equally bound to protest.

Immediately after the creation of the Republic the Labour Representation League met again, and drew up an address which was still concerned above all with the threat of dismemberment or indemnity: "To carry out such threats would be simply to furnish the conditions for future war, and in the name of humanity these threatened spoliations ought to be energetically protested against."⁶⁴ The demands for intervention followed not from the creation of the Republic but from the increasing threat of a Carthaginian peace in October and November.⁶⁵ In September the position of the two-month-old Workmen's Peace Committee was virtually identical to the position of those who later became interventionists, and still tactically similar to Marx's non-partisan and non-interventionist stance. Early in September Cremer told an Arundel Hall meeting that he opposed all "taking of sides" in the war, even though it was now a war between a republic and a military dynasty. Cremer's Committee had already issued 60,000 addresses opposing all war and standing armies. At the Arundel Hall meeting Odger was more sympathetic to the growing pro-French consensus, but the meeting passed a resolution which leaves no doubt about the nature of pro-republican feeling. The Republic was not so much a victory for the political emancipation of French working men; it was a victory for peace. The meeting "hails with gladness the restoration of a French Republican Government as calculated to lead to a speedy end of the war...."⁶⁶

On 17 September the *Beehive* reported the official founding meeting of the Workmen's Peace Association in St. James's Hall. Many of the later

⁶³ *Beehive*, 3 September 1870, p. 457.

⁶⁴ *Beehive*, 10 September 1870, pp. 465-66.

⁶⁵ The Intervention Committee was founded on 7 October by the Land and Labour League, the International Democratic Association, and Dr. Congreve. It did not demand immediate intervention but a "strictly defensive alliance with France."

⁶⁶ *Beehive*, 10 September 1870, p. 467.

interventionists were there, including E. S. Beesly, J. H. Bridges, Dr. Congreve, George Odger, and Robert Applegarth.⁶⁷ Edmond Beales opened the meeting by welcoming the establishment of a Republic, but his support for the Republic was part of his appeal to the working classes to "sweep away war forever from the commerce and industry of this earth, and to assist in abolishing enormous standing armies, the nurseries and instruments of war, and the nurseries also of vice, and crushing burdens upon national wealth and prosperity."⁶⁸ Mottershead and Odger, both members of the International, proposed the now familiar motion welcoming the Republic "as being calculated to lead to a speedy termination of the present frightful and disastrous war." Labour leaders and Positivists were clearly agreed on the fundamental objective of preventing the recurrence of war.

The St. James's Hall meeting saw the beginnings of the disagreement over intervention. When Daniel Guile moved a resolution urging the Prussians to discontinue their march on Paris, Beesly added an amendment which left open the possibility of intervention. But Beesly was not advocating a crusade in defence of republican freedoms. We may take his words at face value: he wanted the government to "use all its effort to prevent the territorial spoliation of France."⁶⁹ The meeting divided evenly on Beesly's motion and Beales declared it passed, with an irony which may have been intentional, "for the sake of peace." The Positivists did of course have their own reasons for wanting the war ended without a dismembered France. They were veteran francophiles who had leapt onto the French side even before the fall of Napoleon.⁷⁰ For the moment Positivist francophilia coincided with the working class interest in a speedy end to the war. But on the subject of intervention there was no consensus. At another meeting in September Dr. Congreve told Reform Leaguers that the neutral powers should intervene "with their forces" if that were the only way to stop the war. His audience was less certain that such drastic methods were needed, and passed a motion urging the government to recognise the Republic and "to endeavour to arrange terms of arbitration in order to stay the progress of this horrible war."⁷¹ Working-class meetings in the autumn of 1870 were generally unwilling to reject the idea of intervention altogether, but there was no unanimity even on such a negative proposition. At a meeting in Arundel Hall in September Galbraith of the W.P.A. moved an amendment opposing intervention in any circumstances which was defeated by only seven votes. The meeting, which was attended by Latham, Howell, Applegarth and Potter, did not then call for intervention but for English mediation and a system of international arbitration.⁷² Even the Anglo-French Intervention Committee, set up by the Land

⁶⁷ Also there were Daniel Guile, Thomas Mottershead, Magee Pratt, Benjamin Britten, J. D. Nieass, J. Galbraith and W. D. Stainsby.

⁶⁸ *Beehive*, 17 September 1870, p. 485.

⁶⁹ *Beehive*, 17 September 1870, p. 485.

⁷⁰ See for instance E. S. Beesly, *A Word for France* (London, 1870).

⁷¹ *National Reformer*, 18 September 1870.

⁷² *Beehive*, 17 September 1870, p. 485.

and Labour League and the International Democratic Association, did not call for immediate unilateral intervention but for the recognition of the Republic and a "strictly defensive alliance" with France in the event that Prussia should continue her present course. The Land and Labour League, although sympathetic to the interventionists, fell in with the anti-war movement and held a series of meetings on the evils of war and standing armies.⁷³

The anti-war movement also won support from Charles Bradlaugh, who was at this time the most popular orator among London working men. Bradlaugh's meetings, and his journal the *National Reformer*, suggest again that the Franco-Prussian War had aroused an anti-war campaign rather than the traditional democratic campaign. Bradlaugh's meeting in the Hall of Science on 19 September "did not intend to urge any interference in an armed point of view, but merely to recommend a peaceable negotiation."⁷⁴ As if to underline his interest in peace, Bradlaugh invited Henry Richard to attend this meeting, and the meeting appointed Richard to a committee to agitate for a negotiated settlement to the war. The refusal of Richard and other middle-class liberals to serve on the committee seemed to prove that the settlement of the war was exclusively a working-class interest. Bradlaugh lectured throughout the autumn on "War, and its Effect on European Peoples." The *National Reformer* had advocated non-intervention since the summer and had supported the idea of a "peace-maintaining union" of European powers.⁷⁵ Bradlaugh was consistently in step with the pacifist campaign against Prussian militarism and the dismemberment of France.

The Remonstrance of 17 January 1871 which urged British "intervention" in the war made clear that future peace was the sole reason why the government should take action. The Remonstrance was signed by the Positivists and many labour leaders, including Lloyd Jones, Odger, Allan, Applegarth, Potter, Howell, and Coulsen. The Remonstrance declared that "existing relations of the European Powers have been violently broken up, with no new basis of harmony substituted," and that "a great military monarchy has been established" which is "threatening to the peace of Europe."⁷⁶

We believe that common safety requires a closer connection to be established with the mutual Powers, with a view to the formation among them of a Mutual League of Self-defence, ... prepared jointly to repress any attack that may threaten the general peace.

⁷³ *The Republican*, 1 November 1870, p. 6; *National Reformer*, 11 September 1870; 18 December 1870.

⁷⁴ *National Reformer*, 25 September 1870.

⁷⁵ *National Reformer*, 28 August 1870; 25 September 1870; 2 October 1870. Other liberals invited to serve on Bradlaugh's committee were Peter A. Taylor, Sir Charles Dilke, Sir Henry Hoare, Henry Fawcett, Charles Gilpin, John Stuart Mill, E. S. Beesly, Dr. Congreve, and Charles Watts. Only Hoare accepted.

⁷⁶ *Beehive*, 7 January 1871, p. 4.

The meeting agreed that England should join France in the war only if the Germans failed to make peace on reasonable terms, without annexing part of France. Frederic Harrison made clear that England should intervene only with the assistance of the neutral powers. This was no demand for British intervention on behalf of republican freedoms threatened with extinction. Nor was this a demand for unilateral armed intervention. This was merely a call for a system of collective security guaranteed by all powers.

Even so qualified a declaration in favour of intervention divided London working men. The division in working-class opinion is confirmed by Marx, Engels, police reports submitted to Gladstone, and by the records of meetings in January.⁷⁷ The W.P.A. led the opposition to the Positivists and forced the interventionists to qualify their position further. In the Hall of Science on 10 January Lucraft moved an amendment against intervention and forced from Bradlaugh the following compromise between intervention and peace: "He said he had never advocated a declaration of war against Germany.... If the neutral powers united with us in resisting the exorbitant demands of Prussia, there would be not need for us to go to war. Bismarck would yield to their remonstrances."⁷⁸ Charged by Galbraith of the W.P.A. with advocating war against Germany, George Odger assured the Reform League that "he was decidedly a peace man."⁷⁹ On 12 January Dr. Congreve deferred to the opinion of a meeting in St. George's Hall: "he would here waive his opinion as to how far the English Government should be urged to go in support of France...."⁸⁰ Meetings later in January backed away from the idea of intervention; J. J. Meriman's republican committee avoided the subject; and letters opposing intervention appeared regularly in the *Beehive*.⁸¹ The Positivists were suddenly out of step with the anti-war priorities of most of London's labour leaders. The call for intervention was not repeated. The leaders of English working-class opinion watched the Republic being crushed by a military despotism and most of them acquiesced in their government's decision not to intervene. They were more impressed by the costs of war than by the needs of the French Republic or the rights of the French worker. Political liberty in England no longer required English support for the continental liberator. The radical working man offered the French republican a homily against war and the assistance of international moral force against the invading tyrant.

⁷⁷ *Gladstone Papers*, B. M. Add. Ms. 44617, f. 95; F. Engels, *Eastern Post* 5 February 1871, p. 5; for Marx's comments on Mottershead and others being "bought up by the Peace Society" see Frank Gees and R. M. Black, *The Harney Papers* (Assen, 1969), p. 215.

⁷⁸ *National Reformer*, 15 January 1871, p. 39.

⁷⁹ *National Reformer*, 15 January 1871, p. 46; and the *Beehive*, 28 January 1871, p. 11.

⁸⁰ *National Reformer*, 22 January 1871, pp. 54-55.

⁸¹ See the report of the Trafalgar Square demonstration, *Beehive*, 28 January 1871, p. 11; and the *Beehive*, 21 January 1871, p. 10; 7 January 1871, p. 12; 14 January 1871, p. 1; 7 January 1871, p. 11.

Even as they rejected the rhetoric of the middle-class "peace at any price" party, labour leaders had effectively aligned themselves with the middle-class opposition to all war. But the working-class pacifists had not succumbed to the propaganda of the Peace Society, nor had they passively surrendered to a middle-class interpretation of their interests. Pacifism emerged from the tradition of working-class internationalism, and even in 1870 pacifists and socialists spoke the same language. The W.P.A. policy on the war coincided closely with the tactical policies of Marx and Engels. In his first address on the war, dated 23 July, Marx took no sides in a war between two military dynasties; the first address of the W.P.A. likewise took no sides. Marx warned the German workers to avoid a war of conquest against the French people; so did the W.P.A. Marx urged that workers of all nations unite to put an end to war; so did the W.P.A. Marx did not advocate that the war be settled by arbitration, but on this point the W.P.A. was closer to current thinking in the labour movement than was Marx.⁸² The difference did not appear serious at the time. The Peace Society found little fault with Marx's address and, demonstrating once again the remarkable opportunism of the pacifists, the Peace Society helped to pay for the distribution of Marx's address in France and Germany.⁸³

Marx's second address on the war, published on 11 September, advised against unqualified support for an "Orleanist" government at war with a dynastic tyranny. Marx warned that "the arrogance of success and dynastic intrigue" would lead Germany to the dismemberment of France, which would make a war of revenge certain. "The present tremendous war will be but the harbinger of still deadlier feuds...." Marx argued against the "desperate folly" of an insurrection by the workers in Paris, and urged the French to work peacefully towards the establishment of "Republican liberty."⁸⁴ He committed the International to the campaign for recognition of the Republic and against the dismemberment of France. He opposed any call for armed intervention, arguing that English dynastic and class interests would prevent any English government from going to war on behalf of a republic. Engels was still taking this line early in 1871, and agreeing with the anti-interventionists that "war would postpone everything, that all social and political progress would be put aside, and that every war had hitherto tended to give the aristocracy a new lease of power."⁸⁵ The coincidence of W.P.A. policy with the tactics of Marx and

⁸² COLLINS and ABRAMSKY, pp. 178-79.

⁸³ *General Council of the First International: Minutes 1870-1871*, pp. 43, 49. On 23 August Eccarius stated that twenty pounds had been received from the Peace Society. The offer of twenty pounds was made in a letter dated 9 August 1870. The letter acknowledged "the pacific efforts being made by the General Council of the International Working Men's Association," and offered twenty pounds on the understanding that "this sum is entirely to be appropriated to the further foreign distribution of your address." Letter of 9 August 1870, *Peace Society Copy Letter Book*, Peace Society archive, Fellowship House, Browning Street, London S.E. 17.

⁸⁴ See MARX, *The Civil War in France*, POSTGATE, ed. (London, 1921).

⁸⁵ *Eastern Post*, 5 February 1871, p. 5.

Engels is obvious enough. The W.P.A. also refused to take sides in the war, and sought to prevent dismemberment and its inevitable sequel, a war of revenge. The W.P.A. also campaigned for the peaceful establishment of the Republic. When Lucraft told the St. James's Hall meeting on 10 January that it was folly to expect an English government to go to war in the interest of the French Republic, he was speaking for both the International and the W.P.A. It is no surprise that General Council members (Odger, Weston, Applegarth, and Mottershead) should urge a "speedy end to the war" from the same platform as Cremer, Le Lubez, Howell, and other pacifists. It is little wonder that such radicals as Beesly could acclaim the International as a vehicle for spreading anti-war teachings among the working classes.⁸⁶ The Manchester and Birmingham Trades Councils affiliated with the International during the war, and their reasons for doing so were explicitly pacifist: the International was "the only association that appears likely at present to produce that fraternal feeling by which the curse of war and its primary causes may be swept from the earth."⁸⁷

The English pacifists had clearly seen only Marx's tactical stance and not his strategic purposes. Marx himself had inadvertently encouraged the confusion. In view of his belief that war could be the midwife of social revolution, it is perhaps surprising that his war addresses clung so firmly to the view that war led only to further exploitation. But Marx had seen war arouse a response among working men which was distinct from the response of any other class and faithful to the radical nostrums of the past. He had attempted to use the anti-war consensus to unite the working classes against a tangible and destructive combination of class enemies. The war afforded an opportunity to warn against a renewed triumph "of the lords of the sword, of the soil, of capital." This was perilously close to the message of the W.P.A.: war was a system of class oppression in which workers had no interest. It was too easy for war itself to become the source of oppression rather than the means of exposing the oppressors. The apparent coincidence of Marxist and radical aims in 1870 was not fortuitous, however. Anti-war protest appealed to working-class radicals precisely because it simulated a revolutionary appeal to class organization against the world's oppressors. By protesting against war, radical pacifists could reaffirm the dignity and independence of their class at the same time as they accepted a social order in which they must remain subordinate.

The Commune relieved Marx and Engels of a serious dilemma. By early 1871 the International was divided over the correct response to the war. Engels' solution — an English naval war against Russia — flew in the face of his own argument that military intervention on the continent was impossible given the class basis and dynastic interests of English government. But Russophobia must confront an even more powerful argument, as Martin Boon reminded Engels: "With a powerful fleet, England could make war in any part of the world, and cripple the power of Russia, but the

⁸⁶ *Fortnightly Review*, November 1870; COLLINS and ABRAMSKY, p. 186. (Beesly's article was drafted in consultation with Marx).

⁸⁷ COLLINS and ABRAMSKY, p. 190.

working class were afraid of being more heavily taxed than they were already if England should go to war..."⁸⁸ Pacifism helped put an end to Russophobia in the English labour movement. Seven years later the W.P.A. and the trade unions united with the Liberal Party and opposed a war against the czar. Julian Harney, in exile in America, witnessed the death of chartist internationalism and the triumph of the peace movement, and shared his disgust with Marx.⁸⁹

The W.P.A. flourished in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune. If annual income is any indication of the strength of the movement, then W.P.A. support was greater than that of any political organization among working men in the 1870s. W.P.A. income for the year ending 30 June 1872 was £ 1,010.⁹⁰ Even if we exclude the financial contribution from the Peace Society, W.P.A. income was still twice that of the T.U.C. in 1872. Not until 1883 did the income of the T.U.C. surpass that of the W.P.A.; the latter's income declined to about £ 500 a year after 1874, and remained fairly constant at this level until the 1890s. By 1873 the leaders of trade unions, Trades Councils and other labour organizations — the representatives of almost a million working men — had signed petitions in support of Henry Richard's parliamentary motion in favour of international arbitration.⁹¹ J. S. Mill had chaired a W.P.A. meeting, and J. R. Seeley had drawn up the W.P.A. plan for a High Court of Nations. By 1875 the W.P.A. had 263 local agents in England, Scotland, and Wales. By 1881 there were a thousand local agents.⁹² Every year the W.P.A. held a conference to coincide with the annual meeting of the T.U.C., and these conferences were always well attended by T.U.C. delegates. The T.U.C. Parliamentary Committees in the 1870s and 1880s included many W.P.A. members, and nine of the twelve working-class MP's elected in 1885 were W.P.A. members or supporters. Cremer kept his leadership of the working-class movement for international brotherhood until the end of the century, and he did so in part by avoiding direct confrontations with government over imperial wars, a subject on which working men were deeply divided. The links between the T.U.C. and the W.P.A. strengthened as Cremer developed his campaign in support of an Anglo-American arbitration treaty. Trade union leaders and MP's united in support of those popular liberal panaceas, disarmament and arbitration, and eventually even Labour MP's, whose socialism Cremer opposed, signed his friendly addresses to continental workers.

Even in the 1870s W.P.A. support had expanded far beyond its original London base. The founders of the W.P.A. fall within a narrow category: they were London artisans with political interests, members of

⁸⁸ *Eastern Post*, 5 February 1871, p. 5.

⁸⁹ Letter of 31 March 1878, in GEES and BLACK, *The Harney Papers*, p. 279.

⁹⁰ *Arbitrator*, August 1872, p. 2. The T.U.C. income in 1872 was 166 pounds. In October 1871 the Peace Society gave a hundred pounds to the W.P.A.: *Peace Society Copy Letter Book*, letter of Henry Richard to Cremer, 27 October 1871. The Peace Society donated similar amounts to the W.P.A. until 1879.

⁹¹ *Arbitrator*, April 1873, p. 1.

⁹² W.P.A. Annual Report, in *Herald of Peace*, July 1881, p. 260.-

radical associations and workmen's clubs, and only a few were active trade union officials. But the W.P.A. rapidly gained support within the Trades Councils and the larger unions. It is very difficult to estimate the extent of this support, since the *Arbitrator* did not print full lists of W.P.A. subscribers or agents. In order to arrive at a rough estimate of the distribution of W.P.A. support, a list has been compiled including the names of all those who are mentioned in the *Arbitrator* as delegates to London and provincial meetings between 1871 and 1880, and all officials of local committees active during the Eastern Crisis in the late 1870s. We may assume that the resulting sample of 653 individuals includes most of the more dedicated W.P.A. supporters in this decade. The sample is large enough to allow some general observations, in spite of the fact that the occupations or trade union affiliations of twenty per cent of the sample remain unknown. Of those whose affiliation is known, the largest group — 25.3 per cent of the total — are listed in the *Arbitrator* as delegates or officials of Trades Councils, reform associations, workmen's clubs, friendly societies, and other working-class organisations. Clothing industries account for 20.4 per cent of the total (103 individuals), and although a third of this group are factory workers, it is the tailors, the shoemakers, and other traditional craftsmen who predominate. The other occupations represented are the building trades (11.9 per cent), agriculture (11.1 per cent), engineering and metals (8.5 per cent), mining (6.1 per cent), printing (3.4 per cent), transport (1.8 per cent), furniture manufacture (1.2 per cent), other crafts (6.9 per cent), and non-manual occupations (3.4 per cent). When compared to the distribution of occupations in the labour force as a whole, those in the clothing trades, printing, building, and furniture are over-represented among W.P.A. supporters. Those in mining, engineering and metals appear in about the same proportion as in the general labouring population, while those in agriculture and transport are under-represented, and servants, seamen, brewers, quarrymen, dock labourers, and general labourers do not appear at all.⁹³

The W.P.A. found most of its support outside the large factories, in spite of Cremer's efforts in the northern factory towns and in spite of his references to "our intimate acquaintance with the leaders of the Lancashire operatives."⁹⁴ The W.P.A. was best represented among politically active artisans and the leaders of the old craft unions. The above figures probably under-estimate the strength of the anti-war movement among agricultural labourers, however. The political awakening of the agricultural workers led by Joseph Arch gave the peace movement the support of a new radical force, for Arch's followers found in anti-war protest a thorough condemnation of the landowning establishment which employed them and recruited them into the nation's armies in large numbers. The W.P.A. responded quickly to the challenge and its agents lectured extensively in

⁹³ The distribution of occupations in the general population is given in R. D. BAXTER, *National Income* (London, 1868), Appendix IV; and Geoffrey BEST, *Mid-Victorian Britain 1851-75* (London, 1971), pp. 95-97.

⁹⁴ *Arbitrator*, May 1878, pp. 4, 16.

rural areas in the mid-1870s. The anti-war Conference held by 656 agents of Arch's union in 1878 was larger than the national Conference of the W.P.A. itself during the Eastern Crisis. Many of the anti-war petitions from agricultural areas during the Eastern Crisis followed from the visits of W.P.A. lecturers. Some of these petitions confirm the reports of W.P.A. lecturers that anti-war protest came from an awakening political consciousness. "My Lord, As workim Men we entreat you to use your utmost influence in Favour of Neutrality in the horriable War between Russia and Turkey, and also agains any increased expendeture in our armaments."⁹⁵ The farm labourer, like other trade unionists, found in pacifism a defence of his hard-won independence and self-sufficiency within a hostile but unchanging social order.

Trade unionist and the self-improved artisans created own community within the industrial environment. Beyond the pale was the urban mob, which included the "ruffians" and "idlers" and youthful "swells" from the taverns who formed the jingo crowds of the late 1870s. W.P.A. supporters were not all prosperous workers, but they were organized workers, those who had found material security and personal dignity in trade unions, friendly societies, internationalist associations, and the radical clubs. In the schools of their childhood and in the struggle for the independence of their class, working-class radicals had become pacifists. When Gladstone addressed the W.P.A. Conference of 10 April 1878, he met his working-class followers. They were, said the leader of the Bolton spinners, "the real working men."⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Petition to the Foreign Office from workers in Mursley, Bucks: F.O. 78, 2930. See also the 82 petitions from rural areas in the *Twenty-Seventh Report of the Select Committee on Public Petitions* (August 1877), pp. 833-36. Similar petitions appear in the *Select Committee Reports for 1878*.

⁹⁶ *Arbitrator*, April 1878, p. 10.