

CHAPTER 1

“For Us the World!”: The Guesdists against the Nation

In one of its incarnations, the POF validated the accusation that Marxists are alien to nationhood, strangers to patriotism, mere “rootless cosmopolitans.”¹ Certainly Parti Ouvrier texts offer few hints of that “enracinement”² in landscape, kinship, and heritage so vital to national identity. The rhetoric of “blood and belonging” played virtually no role in the Guesdists’ discursive self-construction, in sharp contrast to the instinctive nationalism characteristic of their ideological interlocutors—all of whom, from socialist-nationalist competitors like Jaurès, through National Liberal opponents like Ferry, to national-socialist enemies like Barrès, rejoiced in their national “roots.” In the Parti Ouvrier’s most cosmopolitan persona, the movement derided the *patrie* as a false god invoked by charlatans like Jaurès, Ferry, and Barrès to mislead the masses. Rather than mindlessly worshipping that fake “homeland,” Guesdist obeyed *The Communist Manifesto*’s mandate, often underscored in Parti Ouvrier discourse, that “Communists . . . point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality.”³ This injunction could be interpreted as repudiating nationhood, both as authentic historical experience and as valid political project, and *was* so interpreted when the Parti Ouvrier self-consciously embodied Marxism’s “universal, placeless, and especially nation-less”⁴ proletariat. Lafargue exemplified this ultracosmopolitanism when he quoted Renan’s sour observation that “where socialism appears, there patriotism vanishes”—an observation that the Guesdist leader gleefully accepted, not as the intended criticism, but as unintended praise.⁵

This anational, even antinational, sensibility recurred sporadically throughout the POF’s history, and was deeply grounded in the Guesdists’ passions and preoccupations. Prosopographically, their openness to the world mirrored that of their German-Jewish-English master.⁶ Long years of exile typified the life histories of the POF’s leadership—the catastrophic Commune experience having ensured that, like Marx himself, Guesde, Lafargue and many of their lieutenants had joined European socialism’s multitude of “uprooted.” Guesde himself retained strong Italian connections from his exile years, during which Milan had witnessed his abandonment of youthful anarchism for proto-Marxist socialism, and his marriage to a beautiful and polyglot Milanese.⁷ For

his part, Lafargue exemplified nineteenth-century “multiculturalism” and “hybridity.” Of Cuban extraction, flaunting Negro, Jewish, and American Indian blood, living an exile’s life abroad in Spain and England, and married to a London-raised Jew (née Laura Marx), the Guesdist leader was often vilified as a foreigner . . . and rejoiced in the characterization.⁸ On one occasion, having been viciously attacked as alien, Lafargue, described in *Le Socialiste’s* account (almost certainly in his own words) as “priding himself on being international,” simply shrugged with indifference.⁹ French, Cuban, Spanish, Carib, Jewish, Negro—none of these ethnic identities mattered. As far as he himself was concerned, Paul Lafargue was simply a socialist and, as such, a citizen of the world. Other militants proudly emphasized their own years of exile, asserting that the salutary experience had immunized them against nationalist contamination.¹⁰ Yet other Guesdists—like the multilingual Charles Bonnier, who had taught French in Oxford—even if spared Communard banishment, exploited their ramified international networks to enfold themselves in a supposedly seamless fabric of cosmopolitan communion.

Nor were these instances of self-asserted cosmopolitanism individual eccentricities. The Parti Ouvrier as a whole was, in some ways, as cosmopolitan as its cadres. Its membership manifested the Party’s relaxed openness to ethnic “others”—most obviously in the Nord, the heartland of Guesdism, where Belgians played a starring role first in founding and then in sustaining the POF.¹¹ Guesde’s enemies, indeed, indicted the deputy from Roubaix as representing only the city’s teeming naturalized immigrants!¹² At the other end of the country, the Parti Ouvrier strove to recruit the Midi’s many Italian workers, if necessary by appealing to them in their own language. Commenting on the formation of a “section italienne du POF” in the Savoy, *Le Socialiste* happily concluded that this commingling of French and Italians conclusively demonstrated that “for socialism and for the Parti Ouvrier Français, there are no frontiers.”¹³

L’Égalité and *Le Socialiste* filled their columns with articles culled from the world’s Marxist press—not least with articles against nationalism—even, or even particularly, when drawn from *German* socialist journals. Clara Zetkin, for one, might well have been on *Le Socialiste’s* staff, given her prominence in its pages. Financial reports emphasized foreign donations to the POF’s coffers, almost as if to confirm nationalist slanders that the Parti Ouvrier was treasonously funded from abroad.¹⁴ French Marxists, in turn, made demonstrative contributions to socialist movements elsewhere.¹⁵ Guesdists confirmed their cosmopolitanism in noticing how, “each time there is an outburst of labor unrest in a particular country, it finds a sympathetic echo in all other countries.”¹⁶ Guesdists amplified those echoes. Their press publicized foreign support for French strikes, while urging French workers to support labor militancy abroad, on the clear and often explicit assumption that labor should recognize no ethnic boundary separating worker from worker.

As an instance of cosmopolitanism, *Le Socialiste's* commemoration of the Commune's twentieth anniversary emphasized messages from friends outside France—missives from Liebknecht and Engels leading the edition, followed by best wishes from socialists in Spain, Holland, England, Austria, Denmark, Romania, and Italy, giving pride of place to Zetkin, and only then presenting French contributions.¹⁷ The Parti Ouvrier's inclusive language politics reflected this openness to the world. On one fraught occasion, for instance, *Le Socialiste* elatedly reported the anti-Semitic *Libre Parole's* fury over a workers' meeting in Paris, where foreign socialists had been invited to address the throng in their own languages, allegedly evoking enthusiastic cheers. Unlike the splenetic ultranationalists of the *Libre Parole*, the Guesdists' newspaper welcomed this multilingual concord.¹⁸ German, French, Italian, English—all had *really* spoken the language of socialism; all had ignored the *Libre Parole's* urging of “La France aux Français.” At the same time, the Parti Ouvrier's press extensively covered the activities of foreign socialists exiled to Paris, and depicted them, not as resident foreigners, but as comrades with a non-French linguistic background—as, for instance, “German-language socialists resident in Paris.”¹⁹ Militants from across Europe embarked on speaking tours through France at the behest of the Parti Ouvrier, and socialist luminaries from many countries attended the POF's congresses, provoking well-publicized clashes with inflamed nationalist demonstrators.²⁰ Commenting on a violence-ridden tour of southeastern France by Rinaldo Rigola, a former Lyonnais member of the POF and recently elected socialist deputy in the Italian parliament, *Le Socialiste* summed up the experience by affirming that “Italian socialist party or French socialist party, we are citizens of the same nation, the nation of labor.”²¹

“That Absurdity: A Preference for a Special Place”: The Guesdists and Parochialism

In this universalist mode, Guesdists reviled all territorially embedded identities, and mocked not only nationality, but attachment to any *pays*—that untranslatable term for a native place, whether a dialect domain, a historically distinct province, a much-loved village, or a venerable Parisian quartier.²² Most obviously, the Parti Ouvrier evinced no sympathy whatsoever for the nascent regional identities of the Bretons, Catalans, and Basques. Guesdists totally ignored these emerging “ethnies,” although the POF had constructed powerful party organizations in Nantes, the Pyrénées-Orientales, and the Southwest. Even more indicatively, despite the Parti Ouvrier's deep implantation in the humid plains of the Nord, it never recognized a distinct Flemish identity among its adherents—whether in French Flanders itself, or among the thousands of

Belgian immigrants who sustained the POF in its strongholds of Lille and Roubaix. Flemish, Catalan, Basque, Breton—languages spoken by hundreds of thousands on the French periphery—might as well not have existed, for all the attention they received from the Parti Ouvrier. If the POF could thus simply ignore the still timid ethnic reassertion of the Basques or Catalans, it could hardly overlook the militant Languedocian and Provençal regionalist movements—blossoming as they were during the fin de siècle, sung into rebirth by the poetry of Mistral. Nevertheless, no editions of *Le Socialiste du Gard* appeared in the recently reinvented phrases of the langue d'oc. Instead, Guesdists cruelly mocked the Midi's regionalists, deriding their resurrection of a moribund linguistic tradition as pathetic and "grotesque."²³ Unwittingly, ironically, and in common with most of the French Left, the supposedly cosmopolitan French Marxists thus reinforced the jealous hegemony of the "national" language.

The Guesdists' obliviousness to France's own "nations without history" raises a disturbing question: did the Parti Ouvrier's absolute indifference to Basques, Catalans, Flemings, and Bretons and its hostility toward the renescent Midi express a veiled chauvinism, adherence to an all-conquering French identity thinly disguised as universalism?²⁴ So long as the Parti Ouvrier maintained its scathing hostility toward French nationhood itself, the answer to this question must be no. Within a genuinely cosmopolitan POF, the much-mocked "national" identity of France enjoyed no more legitimacy than the "regional" identity of an equally derided Languedoc. But on those other occasions (to be considered in subsequent chapters) when the Party shifted its identity politics from cosmopolitanism toward socialist nationalism, Guesdist indifference to France's multiple ethnic identities lends itself to more critical readings. At best, a "socialist-nationalist" POF has to be indicted for culpable neglect of long-standing historical injustices; at worst, for Francophone cultural imperialism.

Nor did Guesdists sympathize with the provincial localism that was cautiously reemerging from beneath France's Jacobin carapace. This reticence surprises. Despite much militancy in Paris's working-class quarters, Guesdists had failed to make inroads into the capital's socialist subculture, so that the largely provincial POF might well have championed a provincial socialism against the overweening metropolis. Why not meld Marxism with the "regionalism" resurgent throughout provincial France—an inchoate identity as yet without fixed ideological orientation? The French, after all, genuinely experienced their many *pays*, felt them in their hearts as they felt for their families. Why not bind that heartfelt experience of home to the "imagined community" of global socialism, as nationalists would so effectively bind it to the imagined community of the nation?²⁵

Yet the Parti Ouvrier utterly failed this opportunity. As true heirs of the First Republic's revolutionary centralism, Guesdists self-consciously rejected

the dialectic between the organic local and the locally transcendent so impressively mastered by the ultranationalist Right.²⁶ Guesde paraded none of the intense Parisian “patriotism” characteristic of Edouard Drumont, although the Parti Ouvrier’s leader was as much the son of *vieux Paris* as the chauvinist agitator. As for Barrès’s flamboyantly publicized *enracinement* in his beloved Lorraine, the national socialist’s affectation struck Guesdists as absurd, while the kindred particularism of the Action Française’s Charles Maurras, both Provençal poet and integral nationalist, found no echo whatsoever in either the Parti Ouvrier’s antinational or socialist-nationalist self-identities. The nation, for French Marxists, was either repudiated, along with its provinces, or construed, in the grand Republican tradition, as “one and indivisible.” Ironically, the largely provincial Guesdists were thus de facto as centralist as the largely Parisian Blanquists. In practice, in the practicalities of headquarters, meeting places, and editorial rooms, the French Marxists’ world turned on Paris—however cosmopolitan that world may have been as ideal, however local and provincial as embedded political culture. Not for French Marxists, then, their period’s “reveil des provinces.”²⁷

The POF, indeed, campaigned ferociously *against* local identities, if only because such identities had planted deep roots in France’s proletarian subsoil, and thereby impeded the Guesdists’ cultivation of a nationwide, even worldwide, “working-class interest.”²⁸ Manifesting these impediments, workers’ diatribes against “foreigners” who invaded local labor markets sometimes referred to “immigrants” from other parts of France—an indication that, for the “popular classes,” “French” nationality hardly became an instituted reality until the later nineteenth century, with the citizenship code of 1889 and the administrative identification of “resident aliens” in 1888.²⁹ Parisian building workers thus barely distinguished between Breton and Italian laborers who trespassed upon their terrain.³⁰ Acutely aware of this threat to proletarian unity, French Marxists fiercely criticized socialists like Paul Brousse and Jules Joffrin—Possibilists, Parisian notables, and leaders of the anti-Guesdist “municipal” tendency on the French Left—who shamelessly advanced the interests of their local constituents against “outsiders.” The Parti Ouvrier’s Possibilist enemies on the Paris municipal council had thus sought to solve the unemployment crisis of the 1880s, at least for Parisians, by denying employment to workers with less than six months’ residency in the capital—a strategy that utterly outraged the Guesdists. Confronted by such exclusionary manoeuvres, the POF angrily contended that socialists represented a universal proletariat, not the arrogant exclusivity of the great metropolis, and certainly not the parochial selfishness of a Parisian quartier.³¹

In their critiques of parochialism, French Marxists at their most cosmopolitan simply denied that proletarians *had* local identities. “As to workers, where are their neighborhood interests [intérêts de quartier]?” asked Paul

Grados, one of the few Parisian leaders of the POF. "Everywhere," he continued, "they endure—at Batignolles no less than at Montrouge, at Grenelle just as at Ménilmontant—the same starvation wages and the same slums, the same exploiters and the same landlords." According to his reasoning, workers had the same class-interest and hence the same identity everywhere, "not only in the various quarters of Paris, but in every city and region throughout the land."³² Once proletarianized, Guesdists like Grados argued, workers had been effectively uprooted—their identities thus everywhere identical, whether they loaded barges on the quays of the Seine or ships on the docks of Marseille, whether they excavated mine shafts in the Nord or tunnels for the Parisian metro. In their less absolutist reflections, however, Guesdists admitted, if only to deplore the fact, that some workers still manifested ingrained local identities. "All too many otherwise sensible people," *Le Socialiste* grumbled, "still have difficulty in ridding themselves of that absurdity: a preference for a special place, for the people they find there, and [have], as a consequence, a singular animosity toward those who live elsewhere."³³ Guesdists, in such moments of cosmopolitan extremism, evidently found themselves at home everywhere, or perhaps nowhere, but never somewhere in particular.

This absolutism has, for Marxists, repeatedly obscured the persistence of particularism, and has hindered socialism's mobilization of those—virtually everyone, in fact—who love their home or their homeland. Marxism's utopian universalism has, in particular, all too often forestalled creative engagement with the "national question," and thereby made Marxists more vulnerable to nationalism—whether as enemy or as seducer.³⁴ Marxism's resultant defeats and seductions have convincingly demonstrated that "it is only by 'going through' nationality, rather than around it, that we can get to the other side, to universality."³⁵ Why, then, have Marxists, when confronted by particularism, so often adopted "avoidance strategies"? Most fundamentally, they have refused to answer "the national question" (or the "question de quartier," for that matter) because they have failed to see its pertinence. They have founded their philosophical anthropology on the universal human capacity for creativity, rather than on individuals' particularizing hunger for self-identity. Manifesting creative capacities—or "labor," as Marxists have conceived creativity—has no particularistic implications, only implications for the individual or for humanity as a whole. Becoming a fine parent, being a good friend, conceiving a novel idea, crafting a beautiful pot—none of these necessarily divides "man from man" (or even man from woman!). They are groundings from which can grow cosmopolitan universality. Establishing self-identity, however, implies particularity defined against an "other" (initially, of course, against the parent). "I am a man, not a woman." "I am normal, not a pervert." "I am Catholic, not a Jew." "I am French, not German." All such identities are particularistic; all are potentially divisive. Combine their terms, represent the man, the heterosexual, the

gentile, the Frenchman, and there emerges a “National Front”—patriarchal, homophobic, anti-Semitic, chauvinist. Marx was able to reject, even ignore, this divisive dialectic of identity formation because his own self-identity was so all-inclusive. “I am a human,” he was wont to claim. “Nihil humani a me alienum puto” (Nothing human is alien to me).³⁶ He, like his followers, failed to realize that “real” individuals (even Marx himself, in his unthinking moments as Victorian patriarch or imperial European) humanize themselves through identification with “particular wholes” defined against others, as well as through laboring for *the* “greater whole” of universal humanity.³⁷

At the same time, Guesdists were misled by their political theory, or by their lack of one. They shared Marx’s bitter hostility to politics as “representation”—whether in the “general interest’s” representation by Hegel’s rationalistic bureaucrats, in Caesarist embodiment, or through “bourgeois parliamentarianism.”³⁸ Guesdists thus remained trapped in a noble but vacuous commitment to direct democracy. Without bureaucracy, Caesar, or parliament, they had no way of embodying a people in a polity, while still expecting such embodiment on a world scale! Their political theory might, just conceivably, have legitimized the participatory democracy of a works council or a community forum, and Guesdists dreamt vaguely of a global commonwealth. But no intermediate entity between comradeship and cosmopolis made much sense within their (non)political paradigm.³⁹ No wonder Guesdists found it so difficult, if not impossible, to appropriate the nation, or even the *pays* or the province, for their political purposes!

Their universalistic political theory generated a further fallacy: the assumption that any polity short of cosmopolis meant war—an assumption remarkably similar to the brutal “realism” of the modern Machiavellians, albeit used to justify cosmopolitanism rather than an endless war-of-all-against-all. Guesdists here failed to distinguish between power-political *nationalism* and universalistic *patriotism*. The Parti Ouvrier might have adopted and adapted the “French” ideal of the “patriot-citizen,” while rejecting the particularistic “Central European” mystique of “blood and soil.”⁴⁰ Such patriotism could, at least in theory, have been blended with the Guesdists’ treasured cosmopolitanism, and might then have articulated a range of nonexclusive Marxist identities—from the beloved locality, through nations as civic communities, to an all-inclusive world-state. Guesdists, unfortunately, conflated “patriotism,” the legacy of antique Stoic republicanism, with “nationalism,” defined as ethnic exclusion. This indiscriminate commingling of universalistic Republican patriotism with “blood and soil” chauvinism, and the Guesdists’ repudiation of the two together, played into the hands of their enemies. France’s liberal Republicans were given a “free goal,” monopolizing civic patriotism, while the antiliberal national socialists appropriated ethnic “France” for their mythic cause—with Guesdists relegated to a universalism without concrete embodiment.⁴¹

**“That Final Communion: A Planetary Internationalism”:
Guesdist Cosmopolitanism**

The Marxists of the POF thus rejoiced in a cosmopolitanism at least as all-inclusive as Marx's own. In their universalistic mode, Guesdists pledged allegiance to “the grand homeland that is humanity”⁴² and sharply distinguished the “homeland of which we dream” from “that of our chauvinists.” The French Marxists' dreamworld encompassed “humanity as a whole,” and promised “the liberation of every human being, without distinction of sex, of race, or of nationality.”⁴³ As true heirs of the Enlightenment, Guesdists systematically incorporated the philosophes' humanistic universalism into fin de siècle socialism, loyal to Marx's maxim that “nothing human is alien to me.” Loyalty to a particular place, to a particular people, as Guesdists understood such particularism, betrayed Marxism's all-embracing allegiance to global humanity. “For us the world!” cried Guesde: “A world become the great homeland for all in which we will all be equal citizens!”⁴⁴

French Marxists inflected this Enlightenment trope with their own class-focused ideology. Just as integral nationalists arraigned “internal enemies” (including Marxists) before the court of national interest, so Guesdists indicted class traitors before the tribunal of worldwide humanity. In the Parti Ouvrier's rogues' gallery, “bourgeois nationalists” were the worst culprits. They had literally “alienated” themselves from the human race. As so often with the humanist dictum that “nothing human is alien to me,” there lurked the latent suggestion that “all that is alien to me is inhuman.” In keeping with the “othering” inherent in identity politics (even in the identity politics of cosmopolitanism), dehumanizing metaphor peppered Guesdist polemic. Nationalism was a noxious “weed” to be uprooted by the socialist plough;⁴⁵ it was “bestial,” and transformed men into ravaging brutes;⁴⁶ it was a “plague” against which socialism alone conferred immunity.⁴⁷ Weeds, beasts, bacilli—bourgeois nationalists were the “alien other” to socialist humanity.

On the other hand, Guesdists found compatriots wherever workers mobilized, whether they came “from Prussia or Lorraine, whether they are Semites or Latins.”⁴⁸ In the Guesdists' cosmopolitan code, the “homeland” to which Marxism pledged allegiance was “the workers' revolution” fought “without distinctions of nationalism or race.”⁴⁹ This proletarian *patrie* was worldwide, fulfilling the promise of that radiant dawn of 1789 when “the homeland had not been . . . a bit of territory limited by geological determinism or the accidents of history”; when, instead, “the homeland was the revolution.”⁵⁰ The POF thus claimed the “sublime internationalism of the revolutionary bourgeoisie” originally manifest in the Jacobins' First Republic, before that internationalism had “degenerated” into the Third Republic's “disgusting cosmopolitanism of thieves.”⁵¹ Once the workers' revolution had destroyed

this repulsive “bourgeois republic,” once socialism had triumphed across the globe, Guesdists expected the resultant socialist world order to dismantle the last barriers dividing man from man, whether they were the barriers of class or of nationality. Entranced by this messianic vision, the Parti Ouvrier eagerly anticipated the millenarian moment when “various human fragments, disseminated across the planet, will attain that final communion: a planetary internationalism.”⁵²

What, then, of that other “communion,” the one in which French nationalists worshiped: the *patrie*—that “homeland” consecrated by the blood of ancestors, binding the ancestors’ heritage to the aspirations of today’s *enfants de la patrie*, incarnate in the numinous landscape of *la belle France*? Not for Guesdists such mysticism. Enraged by nationalism’s “savage passions,”⁵³ Guesdists let fly an astonishing repertoire of vituperative rhetoric. “Savagery,” indeed, was a favorite Guesdist characterization of nationalism, which was portrayed, for instance, as a “bloodthirsty and savage incitement to massacre.”⁵⁴ According to the French Marxists, in a time commanded by the capitalist world-market and promised by history to the socialist International, nationalism had become as obsolete, ridiculous, and ultimately malignant as tribalism. Affronted by nationalist demonstrations against performances of Wagner’s *Lohengrin* at the Paris Opéra, Guesdists contemptuously pointed out (ignoring Wagner’s own Teutonic racism) that “Wagner, along with socialism, has history on his side. Patriotism can do nothing against either of them, or with either of them. It’s too petty, and won’t last.”⁵⁵ Not for the Parti Ouvrier that absurd toast: “Wright [*sic*] or wrong, my country!”⁵⁶

France, instead of emanating from her people’s blood, instead of flowing from her fecund landscape, was for Guesdists a mere historical construct built “solely by force,” the force that “alone has constituted the transient unity that carries the name French Nation.”⁵⁷ Following the logic of this “constructivism,” the Parti Ouvrier derided “natural frontiers” as geopolitical fantasy. Asking himself why a randomly winding river like the Rhine was treasured as a “national” boundary, Lafargue could find only one answer: “force!”⁵⁸ Strasbourg and Colmar may have become German in 1871 by force majeure, he admitted, but they had earlier been rendered “French” in exactly the same manner. Languedoc, for its part, had been incorporated into France during a thirteenth-century “crusade of extermination.”⁵⁹ Simon de Montfort’s genocidal campaign against Cathari Languedoc, according to the Guesdist, was only one of many royal instances of bloodletting that had eventually coagulated into “France.” Paradoxically, the cosmopolitan Lafargue thus agreed with the ultranationalist Maurras: France had been constructed by monarchical aggression. The two ideologues, however, reached opposite conclusions from this historical insight. For Maurras, it legitimated monarchy; for Lafargue, it delegitimized the nation.

Following the logic of these antinationalist precepts, the Parti Ouvrier shunned France's national symbols. Guesdists chanted the *Internationale* rather than the *Marseillaise*, celebrated the Commune's anniversary rather than Bastille Day, and flaunted the red flag rather than the *tricolore*. The colors of the national flag, after all, supposedly symbolized the nation's tripartite division into classes: white for the aristocracy, blue for the bourgeoisie, red for the proletariat. The *tricolore* would soon be superseded—once class had been abolished.⁶⁰ Purged of bourgeois and aristocrats, the classless France of the future would fly the workers' red flag, as would the entire world—the *drapeau rouge* thus proclaiming both the end of class and the extinction of nationality. As for Bastille Day, it had supposedly degenerated into a bacchanalian orgy even as it had, to the Guesdists' chagrin, seized the popular imagination. "It must be admitted," Guesdists sneered after a particularly exuberant celebration, "that, as with most things national, the national holiday degenerates further with every year."⁶¹ For the Parti Ouvrier, the *fête nationale* would "always be the celebration of others."⁶² One POF section actually expelled militants caught celebrating the holiday!⁶³ Summing up the POF's antinationalism, Lafargue quoted Renan's Stoic words during the siege of Paris: "Let France perish . . . there is above her the realm of duty and reason"—a realm that, for Lafargue (although certainly not for Renan!), included all the world where socialists strove "to construct the greater homeland of humanity" on "the ruins of [today's] lesser homelands."⁶⁴

For Guesdists in this ultracosmopolitan mood, national identity was capitalist fraud. Bourgeois vendors of false consciousness peddled nationhood as another "opium of the people," but themselves abstained from their stupefying drug. Capitalists abjured nationhood. According to one of Lafargue's mordant satirical pamphlets, which "revealed" the invention by the global ruling elite of a "religion of capital," this all-conquering cult avowed that "capital knows neither homeland, nor frontiers, nor color, nor race, nor age, nor sex; it is an international deity, a universal deity; its law will rule over all the children of man."⁶⁵ As avatars of this universal divinity, the capitalists themselves had "only one homeland: the love of gold";⁶⁶ their "true nation" was "such and such a percentage of interest."⁶⁷ Developing this theme, the Congress of Montluçon, in formulating the POF's definitive edict on the "national question," thus indicted the cosmopolitan bourgeoisie's pushing of national identity as "the last word in confidence tricks."⁶⁸ The credulous might be conned, but bourgeois con men themselves never credited their own nationalist trickery.

The Parti Ouvrier's journalists and speakers regularly evoked the news of the day to illustrate nationalist fraud. Did the French fleet attend ceremonies inaugurating Germany's Kiel Canal? "So much the better for us!" exclaimed a delighted *Le Socialiste*. "Not only won't we have war, but [this incident] is so funny and so instructive [of nationalist hypocrisy]."⁶⁹ Did the mill owners of

Roanne protest that striking workers were betraying France by appealing for support to British textile unions? The Guesdist newspaper *L'Égalité* acerbically disclosed that these self-same “nationalist” employers imported textile machinery from Britain.⁷⁰ Did Paul Leroy-Beaulieu—editor of French capitalism’s house organ *L’Economiste Français*, scourge of socialism, and proud patriot—propose an entente for the duration of the Boer War between French and German holders of Transvaal mining stock? Guesdists roared with laughter, since the resultant organization would intermingle “patriots [in France and Germany] who are thrown into fury by the very word ‘internationalism.’”⁷¹ Did the same Leroy-Beaulieu advise his plutocratic readers to liquidate their holdings in the underperforming French bourse . . . and invest their wealth in booming turn-of-the-century Germany? “So much for patriotism!” crowed *Le Socialiste*.⁷² Did Leroy-Beaulieu attend a meeting in London of the “Liberty and Property Defense League” at the very moment when his political mentors were expelling the German socialist August Bebel from France? The conjunction, *Le Socialiste* pointed out, demonstrated “a logically implied contradiction”: “[I]nternationalist, or at least antipatriotic, in its own interest, the bourgeoisie is only patriotic for—and against!—the proletariat.”⁷³

**“Our Instructors in Internationalism”:
Globalization, Metahistory, and the Capitalist World Order**

Why were Guesdists so convinced that “bourgeois exploitation is today international,” that “it knows neither races nor frontiers”?⁷⁴ There was one obvious answer: the Parti Ouvrier’s political economy. Like Marxists before and since, Guesdists repeatedly demonstrated that capitalism’s commodification of the world and its logic of accumulation undermined every particularism, including nationhood.⁷⁵ The French Marxists faithfully followed the *Manifesto*’s portrayal of how

the need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere. The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of Reactionists, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilized nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed,

not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the productions of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature.⁷⁶

Cosmopolitanism, Guesdists affirmed, was not some quixotic Marxist fancy. It was “already everywhere, in the clothes we wear and which owe their wool to Australia and their cotton to America; in the letters that we write and which international conventions transport to the four corners of the world; in the bread that we eat, baked from the wheat of Russia or India.”⁷⁷ French Marxists of the belle époque—like all Marxists, or at least all those of the Second International—ruthlessly discarded the “depreciated currency of supposed eternal principles” in favor of that “most vulgar yet most indispensable of realities, economic reality.”⁷⁸ By this accountancy, nationhood was one of the most worthless of the fin de siècle’s badly “depreciated currencies.”

In pursuing this thesis, Guesdists highlighted the cosmopolitanism of France’s supposedly nationalist industrialists—a cosmopolitanism described with scathing irony as “the patriotic procedures of employers for the promotion of national industrial prosperity.”⁷⁹ If the Guesdists were internationalists, then how much more so were capitalists! Socialists like Guesde, after all, had never, unlike Eugène Motte—Roubaissian mill owner, ultrapatriot, and victor over Guesde during the 1898 parliamentary elections—invested their earnings in foreign factories, investments that then returned to France as cheap imports to dispossess the Roubaissian workers who had succumbed to Motte’s nationalist blandishments. Having revealed a massive textile works under construction in Russian Poland, *Le Socialiste* drove home the fact that

the headquarters of this enterprise are not in Russia, but in France. . . . Its owners are not Russians, but the industrialists of Roubaix, Tourcoing, and Lille. . . . They are the famous “patriots” of the “Union Sociale” who have hurled the epithet “internationalist” against Guesde.⁸⁰

Thus the Parti Ouvrier understood supposedly “French” industrialists: corporate headquarters in France; class interest invested anywhere and everywhere.

In the POF’s historical dramaturgy, “multinational corporations” strode forth as lead actors in the epic creation of the modern globalizing world. Utterly indifferent to nationality, these vast enterprises bought wherever prod-

ucts were cheapest, invested wherever returns were highest, and sold into the most lucrative markets, wherever they might be. Their shareholders’ portfolios carried no passports as they toured the world, searching for the best coupon.⁸¹ This insatiable accumulation process, according to the Guesdists,

has increasingly substituted the world market for the national market. It has created new industries dependent on foreign sources for their raw materials and on foreign markets for their sales. . . . And, above all, its [internationalism] is in the exploitation of labor, which increasingly replaces a nation’s workers . . . with Belgians, Spaniards, Italians, Swiss, Germans, not to mention Chinese, all turned against their brothers as low-price competition.⁸²

Raw materials, markets, even labor—all were global, not national, despite the bourgeoisie’s lying rhetoric.

However sincere the capitalists’ nationalism (and the Parti Ouvrier rarely granted them sincerity), they had no alternative but to pursue an international and even antinational investment strategy. The POF’s astute political economy demonstrated conclusively that, if “enclosed within ‘national’ frontiers, . . . capitalism could no longer function normally, and would soon collapse.”⁸³ This accumulation imperative governed the world: it knew no limit, and certainly no national limitations. The foundation of Guesdist social and economic theory thus rested solidly on a “capitalist world system” that relentlessly “remakes the world in its image.”⁸⁴ That image shone bright in the Guesdists’ social imaginary:

[N]o nation can any longer enjoy an independent existence. . . . Just as industrialization creates a division of labor within the workplace and within the nation, so it unites workers and nations. It works toward the abolition of class and the unification of the human race.⁸⁵

In this classically Marxist analysis, capitalism moved with majestic inevitability toward its supersession—toward its own transcendence in the classless society of the future, and toward the abolition of nations, which would meld into cosmopolis.

Antinationalism was thus not a pernicious socialist plot, but a dynamic inherent in capitalism’s commodification of the world. Cosmopolitanism was not the utopian dream indicted by realist statesmen, but the gathering reality of capital’s global dominion. Just as eighteenth-century merchant capital had smashed provincial impediments to trade, constructing a cohesive national market and enabling the French Revolution’s abolition of the ancient provinces, so twentieth-century finance capital would demolish nationally bounded economies, constituting an all-encompassing world market and

dooming the nation-state. No longer economically necessary, France would follow Aquitaine into the wastebasket of history. In explicating the anti-national logic of global capitalism, the Parti Ouvrier deemed capitalists, ironically, to be the Guesdists' own "instructors in internationalism."⁸⁶

The Parti Ouvrier founded its cosmopolitan conception not only on political economy but on metahistory. The Guesdists' historicization of national identity, linked to their historicization of modes of production and "modes of reproduction,"⁸⁷ rendered the nineteenth-century bourgeois order of capital, patriarchy, and nationhood transient rather than eternal. How so? Each stage of world-historical development, French Marxists contended, had evoked contingent forms of "patriotism" appropriate to its primary mode of production—an insight that generated a surprisingly complex typology, depending on whether patriotism "was embodied in an individual phenomenon (the king, the chief, the family); a corporative entity (a city, a municipality, a guild); or, finally, a much greater body, a being much more complex (a nation, a province, an empire with its colonies)."⁸⁸ All these forms had been or would be transient. The patriarchal clan, the God-King's domain, the city-state—each ancient particularism had believed itself eternal; each had nonetheless succumbed to history's relentless erasure. The same would hold true for modern nationhood. Guesdists concluded that "no matter how recent the birth of patriotism, how much nearer its death!"⁸⁹

These variations in patriotic modes, according to Guesdist historical thought, had been determined by mutations in the property system. Rulers whose wealth derived from the exploitation of a particular form of historical community would articulate their identity through a commensurate form of "patriotism." When a nomadic clan's property was engrossed by its chief, he necessarily focused its patriotic identity. Let the city-state—classical Athens, medieval Florence, early-modern Geneva—become the locus of property ownership, and patriotism became communal. With the rise of modern "French," "German" and "Italian" bourgeoisies whose economic domains transcended mere cities or provinces, the French, German and Italian nation-states had been born. As burgeoning capitalism created a proletariat with global interests, so arose a novel universalist identity, a contemporary "patriotism" of humanity as a whole.⁹⁰

The Guesdists' "useable past" served them well in mastering their present. If the Parti Ouvrier sought to prove that the allegedly "French" bourgeoisie (whose wealth was actually drawn from around the world) would soon betray France, then the POF could recall how the wealthy of Athens had betrayed their polis to protect their property, when the interest of polis and property had diverged.⁹¹ If French Marxists needed to explain why bourgeois, who had created the modern nation, now betrayed it, then Guesdists could relate how seventeenth- and eighteenth-century capitalists had been mercan-

tilist, dependent on the force and favor of strong “national” states, while showing how contemporary capitalists, by contrast, had become cosmopolitan, their interests “disseminated across the globe.”⁹² If Guesdists sought to explain why the modern proletariat would never heed nationalist exhortations, they could demonstrate how workers under capitalism, unlike the intensely patriotic and securely propertied artisans of medieval towns, had had their means of production expropriated, and thus lacked any stake in “their” nations.⁹³

Nor did the Guesdists confine their history lessons to explication of the past and interpretation of the present. A vision of the future conditioned their readings of both past and present, as has been the case with all metahistories, from the chronicles of Ur to Lyotard’s vision of the “postmodern condition.” Here, in their historical imaginary, the Guesdists augured an imminent utopia: the socialist unification of mankind. According to Alexandre Zévaès, youthful second to an aging Guesde,

[T]he nation presents itself to the eyes of scientific socialism as a stage, as a stage in human evolution in which the tribe, the city, and the province have been successive phases. The International of tomorrow will be the culmination of that long evolution. It is the product of contemporary civilization itself.⁹⁴

Tribes, cities, provinces, nations—their march through the millennia led toward cosmopolis.

The workers of the world incarnated this utopian potential. Their “particular interests as a class,” Guesde contended, “coincide with the general interest, thus transforming the proletariat . . . into the champion of all humanity.”⁹⁵ Unlike every preceding ruling class, a triumphant proletariat would usher in a genuine “commonwealth.” Workers’ property in their socialist order would not exclude others from ownership, from participation, and hence from belonging. Community would deepen to include all those once propertyless, and expand to encompass the world. Just as universal property-ownership would eradicate class divisions, so the consequent universalist identity would erase national distinctions. In *Le Socialiste’s* tracing of this trajectory into the future,

at one time limited to the clan, to the tribe, the idea of the homeland has grown, forming the bourgeois [national] society of all those who have the same interest. It has arrived at its final stage with the proletariat: the International of producers. This [International] will be a very negation of the homeland . . . and this word will no longer have a *raison d’être*, for there will henceforth be only one class, only one collectivity.⁹⁶

History promised global communion.

Easier said than done. Guesdists occasionally admitted that transition from the nationalist present to the universalist future would be more convoluted than this unilinear scheme suggested. At their most sophisticated, French Marxists foreshadowed Lenin and Trotsky's concept of "uneven and combined development." On one occasion, for instance, the Bonnier brothers explained that capitalism had, as yet, left some industries small-scale and individually owned, and therefore unready for "nationalization"; others large-scale and collectively owned through national share markets, and thereby ripe for such nationalization; and yet others all-encompassing in scale and globally owned, and thus ready for the "internationalization" that would be the destiny of all enterprise.⁹⁷ At the fin de siècle, the Bonniers conceded, local, national, and international proprietorship coexisted and clashed, to the befuddlement of any unitary socialist strategy. Clearheaded Marxists such as themselves, however, understood the simplifying logic of history. No Guesdist doubted for a moment that capitalist modernity drove toward transcendence of the nations that capitalism had first erected but would soon demolish—in their place constructing a world order to be inherited by the proletariat.

**"All the Sons of Toil of the Universe":
The Guesdists and Proletarian Internationalism**

Despite their doubts about the imminence of universal globalization, Guesdists imagined an imminent universal proletariat. Capitalists, the Parti Ouvrier suggested convincingly, bought labor power at its cheapest wherever it might be found, and the resultant transnational dynamic, Guesdists argued, not so convincingly, had standardized wages across the globe, thereby creating "common conditions and common interests for workers everywhere."⁹⁸ In an astonishing triumph of theory over observation, Guesdists sometimes seemed to believe that this process had *already* everywhere equalized wages and conditions, instituting "common conditions" constitutive of a united global proletariat. In the categorical formulation of "Jacques Vingtras" (J.-B. Lebas, the future Guesdist mayor of Roubaix), the capitalist world system had already ensured that "the interests of workers . . . are [throughout the world] identical."⁹⁹ For the Parti Ouvrier, these "common conditions" and "common interests" rendered working-class nationalism nonsensical in practice and inconceivable in theory. Wherever workers lived, whatever their labor, they should realize, *would* realize, that "any isolated campaign . . . has become impossible. Only international militancy possesses any value."¹⁰⁰ Bourgeois cosmopolitanism—the agency that had created the world market in capital, labor, and goods—thus created proletarian cosmopolitanism, the agent of worldwide socialist revolution. This dialectic ensured that

the nation is today a word devoid of meaning. Most civilized nations are exploited by a band of cosmopolitan capitalists, to whom have been delivered the soil, commerce, industry, and the national finances. These capitalists have only one homeland: the exploitation of every nation's workers. Workers dispossessed of land and tools . . . now have only one homeland: the social revolution, which will free them from cosmopolitan capitalist exploitation. That homeland is not contained within the frontiers of one nation, but embraces all the sons of toil of the universe.¹⁰¹

“All the sons of toil of the universe”—Marxism's constituency, humanity's hope . . . and the nation's doom.

The colossal emigration from nineteenth-century Europe, often evoked in *L'Egalité* and *Le Socialiste*, classically manifested the bourgeoisie's internationalization of its workforce. Cornish miners on the Victorian gold fields, Piedmontese masons in the building sites of Buenos Aires, Polish ironworkers at the furnaces of Pennsylvania—these regiments mobilized into “the army of the *sans-patrie*”¹⁰² had been recruited not by socialism, but by capitalism. In the Marxists' amazingly optimistic (and wildly unrealistic) understanding of American society, the United States, that New World called into existence by capital, classically illustrated proletarian cosmopolitanism.¹⁰³ Systematically misled by their correspondents in New York and Chicago, the editors of *Le Socialiste* retailed accounts of American workers who had already mingled indistinguishably with midcentury German and Irish immigrants, and now welcomed the tidal wave of Italian, Polish, and Jewish labor sweeping across the Atlantic.

This American melting pot, for Guesdists, exemplified a worldwide dynamic. Throughout capitalism's global domain, among workers from San Francisco to Siberia, from Norway to Argentina, “unity and the common interest that it embodies ends by becoming dearer than any official homeland, which represents in [workers'] eyes only employers' . . . interests.” Thus, “for the industrial proletariat, an international union has been created which is its true homeland.”¹⁰⁴ French Marxists at their most cosmopolitan thereby validated Michael Walzer's insightful comment that “solidarity is the patriotism of the left; often it replaces the sense of citizenship and even love of country.”¹⁰⁵ Certainly Guesdists, in their cosmopolitan guise, had no doubt whatsoever that

the coming revolution will be essentially proletarian, and, since the conditions of life, since the goals, since the interests of the proletariat are *everywhere* identical, that revolution can only be international. . . . If the bourgeois revolution of the eighteenth century abolished the provinces, the workers' revolution will abolish the nations.¹⁰⁶

Transfixed by globalization, the Parti Ouvrier welcomed a fusion of nationalities like that which had supposedly occurred within the American proletariat, and heralded a consequent worldwide working-class revolution that would institute a United States of the Earth.

This vision served Guesdists well in their running battles against critics of cosmopolitanism, critics whose nationalism collapsed into absurdity if posed against the awe-inspiring world market. When Maurice Barrès advocated unity between French workers and French capitalists against foreigners, and particularly against German workers and German capitalists, Guesdists contemptuously referred him to the capitalist mode of production, which supposedly bonded proletarians on both sides of the Vosges into a single revolutionary mass. “In place of national working-class combinations . . . we will see international combinations,” predicted Albert Delon, the Guesdist leader in Nîmes. “We are moving toward a sort of European union”¹⁰⁷—a vision well calculated to outrage the Euro-skeptical Barrès and his protofascist followers. Against Barrèsian nationalism, the Parti Ouvrier anticipated a day “when a German candidate will be able to stand for election in France, and a French candidate in Germany, because the workers will be united by the same militancy and the same cause on both sides of the border.”¹⁰⁸ Guesdists thus based their ultimate ideological identity on the principle that

socialists have only one homeland: the social revolution. All socialists, whatever their nationality, race or color, are fraternally united. The fundamental sentiment uniting them is hatred of capitalism and its agents, whether they're named Ferry, Bismarck, Salisbury, or Katkoff.¹⁰⁹

For the Parti Ouvrier, socialists could only overthrow their Ferrys and Bismarcks by working together internationally. Uncoordinated proletarian national revolutions during the twentieth century would be as futile as uncoordinated local peasant insurrections had been during the Middle Ages.¹¹⁰

At their most prescient, Guesdists fully realized that “socialism in one country” would prove fatally vulnerable to international capital, in the same way that an isolated revolutionary France had eventually been defeated by the united ancien régime.¹¹¹ What is more, Guesdists argued, if national revolutions were necessarily doomed to defeat, then socialist assumption of “national” responsibilities under capitalism suggested an even worse consequence: catastrophic self-betrayal, rather than mere catastrophe. Guesdists foresaw the disastrous socialist-nationalist dynamic of August 1914, when socialist “statesmen” would mobilize their followers against foreign socialists and foreign workers, and do so in collaboration with their nations’ bourgeois and with bourgeois nationalists.¹¹² As uncompromising advocates of proletarian unity across borders and fanatical opponents of class collaboration any-

where, French Marxists feared and detested adventures in national “solidarity,” exemplified for them by Millerand’s “treason” in joining a “bourgeois” government that included General Gallifet, the “butcher of the Commune.” As “His Excellency the Minister of Commerce,” Guesdists snarled, Millerand betrayed not only French socialism, but also the international working class. Such betrayal could not be countenanced, as working-class cosmopolitanism was the form of the future, the destiny of mankind, “the furnace in which will be founded all the melded elements of past society and of future humanity.”¹¹³

Thus was Guesdism at its most cosmopolitan—pledging its allegiance to a universal humanity, embodying that humanity in the global working class, renouncing nationhood as a rotting revenant from the savage past, denouncing nationalism as malignant bourgeois ideology. This obstinate universalism should command our respect. Cosmopolitan inclusion, however utopian, is surely preferable to nationalist exclusion, however pragmatic; proletarian globalism, however spectral, is surely better than working-class xenophobia, however authentic.¹¹⁴ For that matter, the Guesdists’ stringent Marxism illuminated the hard realities of their world, and of ours. Who today, living under the dominion of the IMF, would deny capitalism’s globalizing force? Trillions of dollars sloshing through international capital markets must overwhelm the skeptic. Who today would question that working-class militancy, if confined to single nations, must prove easy prey to capital? The vulnerability of nationally organized labor movements to footloose hedge funds cruelly demonstrates the point. The Guesdists’ cosmopolitan convictions were extreme, but not completely deluded.