A member of the Confédération Générale du Travail (General Confederation of Labour) such as myself might wonder why this commemoration of Proudhon is taking place in Belgium and not in France. I know that a separate speech should highlight the intellectual ties that were forged between Proudhon and Belgium and the legacy that he left there, but I would not like to begin this speech without mentioning the role that Belgium played in his life.

Recall that Proudhon was twice sentenced to prison. The first time, on 28 March 1849, he took refuge in Belgium. But his anxious personality forced him to return earlier than he should have, and his unexpected return cost him 3 years in prison. While imprisoned in Sainte-Pélagie, he wrote several works. It must be said that political prisoners were better treated than they are now, and were let out once per week, and it was during this stay in Sainte-Pélagie that Proudhon got married and his first two daughters were born.

But it was after his second conviction that Belgium’s role became much more important. Proudhon returned to seek asylum on publication of his famous book: Justice in the Revolution and in the Church (1858). Learning from his first misfortunes and expecting to be prosecuted, he immediately fled and remained in Belgium
for 4 years, where he wrote, among others, a book of extreme importance: *War and Peace* (1861). As mentioned earlier today, this work created some problems, because his Belgian friends, who had not fully understood his intentions, believed that Proudhon was justifying war, whereas like a true sociologist, he was trying to show that war had different meanings, that there are many kinds of wars (wars between states, of course, but also wars between social classes) and that there are also wars that are ultimately nothing but competitions, whether free competition or competitions between economic groups in more or less equivalent circumstances. In any case, the fact is this: Proudhon stayed in Belgium for 4 years, from 1858 to 1862. He even waited more than a year after his amnesty before returning to France, because he had limited trust in Napoleon III. Unfortunately, he died just 3 years after his return.

But there are other ties between Proudhon and Belgium. I want to recall that one of the first syntheses attempted between Proudhon and Marx (of which there have been many and you are hearing a new one, or at least a draft of one, mine) was by a Belgian. On the one hand, César de Paepe strongly insisted on the opposition between possession and property; on the other hand, he introduced the idea of decentralising public services as a means of weakening the state while at the same time giving greater impetus to worker self-management.

I believe these three reasons are sufficient for a Frenchman to justify Proudhon’s commemoration being celebrated in Belgium. Of course, this commemoration should have taken place in France, but right now, rather than Proudhon, France is worrying about the presidential elections, a new state of affairs since this is the first time that the President of the Republic will be elected by universal suffrage.

Having said that, I would like to turn to my proposal. I have entitled this speech: ‘Proudhon and Marx’, which may seem paradoxical but which, as I will try to prove to you, it is not. I am, for my part, convinced that the overwhelming and reciprocal antipa-
thy between Proudhon and Marx was based more on purely personal feelings than on their ideas. Though different, their two bodies of thought complemented one other, and I am convinced that a coherent conception of collectivism will be achieved only when a third thinker, equal to Marx and Proudhon, will overcome their mistakes and discover the common thread between them, giving rise to a third doctrine. But perhaps the person who will formulate the synthesis that I am foreseeing has yet to be born. I do not know any current social thinker of the stature of Proudhon or Marx.

Considering Marx’s initial attitude towards Proudhon, his enthusiasm for Proudhon’s early writings – an enthusiasm expressed in the *Rheinische Zeitung*, of which he was one of the editors – if we then open *The Holy Family*, a work written before Marx came to France, we see the persistence of an unreserved admiration. Marx does not just say, for example, that Proudhon is the only thinker who personifies proletarian thought, he also affirms that Proudhon has inspired a total upheaval in social economy. He attributed to him a similar role to that played by Sieyès in the preparation of the French Revolution. According to him, what Sieyès said about the Third Estate, Proudhon expressed for the proletariat: ‘What is the proletariat? Nothing. What does it want to become? Everything’. Is Marx right? Let us say it bluntly: yes, and more than he thought. Indeed, in Proudhon’s first and famous work, *What is Property?* (1840), by means of often superfluous and artificial legal analyses, we find the idea of *surplus value* explained and developed for the first time. To be precise, Proudhon explains that even if the capitalist pays each worker his due, there is something that he does not pay, something that increases the value of the products a hundred or a thousand times: the ‘collective force’. While the ‘individual force’ acquired from the worker is paid, the ‘collective force’ is not. Here we have all of Marx’s theory of *surplus value*. This theory was thus borrowed from Proudhon’s first work. Marx could have said – he almost did say in his early works – that the concept of *surplus value* is a Proudhonian concept. But, since it was in the
first volume of *Capital*, written 27 years later, that Marx examined the problem of *absolute surplus value* and *relative surplus value* in detail, you will not find any remarks of this sort.

There is more. Reading Proudhon’s first book holds another surprise for us, because we learn with astonishment that it was not Marx, but Proudhon, who contrasted ‘utopian socialism’ with ‘scientific socialism’. These terms were thus invented not by Marx, but by Proudhon. Is it a good idea? That is another question. Of course, Proudhon accused Marx of being a utopian socialist. He criticised him for not predicting the possibility of conflicts within realised socialism. For Marx, in realised socialism, when man and society are finally reconciled, there are no more conflicts and everything works for the good of the world. In Proudhon’s eyes, this is the very sign of utopia! For him, there is no society in which all problems are resolved. New problems arise constantly, because society is constant creation, it is ongoing. Socialism is not a final stage: there is no end to history, there are only new problems to solve.

Conversely, for Marx – as he said and repeated dozens of times – Proudhon was the representative of utopian socialism par excellence. Why? Because Proudhon’s socialism advocated self-management, so brilliantly explained today by Daniel Guérin. But self-management involves a variety of problems and, for Marx, socialism based on self-management was a form of utopian socialism. I therefore believe that the term ‘scientific socialism’, opposed to ‘utopian socialism’, is an unfortunate term. But, because it has been used often, perhaps too often, I want to point out that it comes not from Marx, but from Proudhon. And if the latter is guilty of something, it is surely that he promoted this term that should never have been used.

Things began to get worse between Proudhon and Marx when they met in Paris and felt overwhelming antipathy for each other. The result was that Proudhon’s *System of Economic Contradictions* (1846), which was subtitled *The Philosophy of Poverty*, inspired...
resentatives of the base councils in planning bodies. The way to
democratising the Russian revolution is paved and it is Proudhon
who has the honour of having paved it.

Does this mean that Proudhon is infallible? He has been criti-
cised very much here, and on the whole I agree with the criticisms
that have been made. I could have even extended this speech to ex-
plain my own reservations. But I am convinced, for my part, that no
social doctrine that is concerned about both dedogmatising Marxism
and correcting Proudhon by surpassing them both is possible with-
out a synthesis of the thought of these enemy brothers. For these
enemy brothers are condemned to seeing their contributions melt
into a third doctrine. And it seems to me that the day is not far off
when a mind their equal will achieve this synthesis. Several have
already been tried. I cited César de Paepe from Belgium. In France,
a little later, Jaurès pursued a constant effort in the same direction.
More attempts will certainly be made. Time favours worker self-
management.

At the moment, it is my deep conviction that there is only one
choice for the world: fascism or a decentralised collectivism. For
organised capitalism, frightened by the worker movement, is be-
coming not only more and more technocratic, but fascistic. There
are different species of fascism, including the fascism of organised
capitalism or the fascism of fear. This threat can only be counter-
tered by a new collectivism, neither Marxist nor Proudhonian, but
surpassing both. But this collectivism cannot be achieved without
worker self-management, which is making progress. I therefore be-
lieve that Proudhon’s merits are immense. They can be measured
by his ongoing relevance both in the west and in the east. To be
both threatening and attractive both to so-called western democra-
cies and to popular democracies, is this not evidence that we have
seen far and wide?

Marx’s only work written in French: *The Poverty of Philosophy*
(1847). In this book, Marx criticised Proudhon for being an idealist
and accused him of not understanding Hegel, the Hegel that Marx
had revealed to him. It must be stressed that these allegations
are false. A man who denounces idealism on almost every page
should not be accused of ideomania. Proudhon tirelessly hunts
ideomania down, from Plato to Leibniz and in many more recent
thinkers. How could someone who hates ideomania so much be
idealistic?

You immediately sense that something is wrong, that Marx is
being unfair to Proudhon. Let me quote this extract from a letter
where Proudhon writes about *The Poverty of Philosophy*: ‘A tissue
of crudities, slanders, falsifications and plagiarism’. Moreover, he
notes in his own copy of *Poverty*: ‘The true meaning of Marx’s
work is that he regrets that I have thought like him everywhere
and that I was the first to say it’. Proudhon says (and I must rule
in his favour): ‘Have I ever said that principles are anything other
than the intellectual representation, not the generative cause, of
facts?’

Let us recognise that Marx was very skilful here, because by at-
tacking Proudhon and judging him with extreme severity, he was
aiming at a different man through him, and that man was called
Hegel. Ultimately, it is not Proudhon, but Hegel that *The Poverty
of Philosophy* stands against. It is quite paradoxical to see Marx assert
that Proudhon never understood Hegel, while in this very book, it
is Marx himself who attacks and discredits Hegel with such excep-
tional vigour.

What actually remains of the complaints against Proudhon?
Marx claims that Proudhon has a dialectical mind only in the sense
that he constantly seeks contradiction and therefore gets stuck
in contradictions. But this forgets that, aside from the Hegelian
dialectic, there are other interpretations of the dialectic. Showing
that Proudhon had a dialectical mind, that he understood the
dialect in a hundred different ways, where antinomy was not
always essential, but where equally dialectical complementarities and balances appeared – did this not show that Proudhon, far from discrediting the dialectic, multiplied its methods? In sum, when you read Marx attentively, you see that he charges Proudhon with all the sins of the dialectic, without recognising that at the same time Proudhon initiated its new directions. The very directions that have won out today and link the dialectic to an ever-renewed empiricism.

The Revolution of 1848 came. Marx, as usual, was not expecting it. Events, it is true, almost always surprise those who profess to predict them. The Communist Manifesto came late: it appeared in London in March, while the Revolution broke out in February in Paris. Moreover, the Communist Manifesto found no more of a real audience in France than the Poverty of Philosophy. Translated far too late, it passed unnoticed in the midst of the general tumult.

Meanwhile, from 1847 Proudhon attacked Le Représentant du peuple, the government and Louis Blanc on a daily basis. We have talked about Louis Blanc here, but we have forgotten to mention that it was Louis Blanc who organised the ‘National Workshops’ and it was their failure that provoked the workers’ insurrection. During the workers’ insurrection in June 1848, Proudhon, who had just been elected to the National Assembly, gave a famous speech, a speech that caused a scandal and earned him the hostility of all his colleagues. He is the only one who took a stand in favour of the workers, in terms such that Marx himself, in the obituary he devoted to Proudhon, recognised that ‘it was an act of great courage’. Indeed, you all know the result of this speech: the censure that the National Assembly inflicted on Proudhon, by 691 votes to 2, one of these two votes being Proudhon’s. He had found only one supporter! In any case, he had unanimous support against him, and Marx paid tribute to him.

From Marx’s point of view, if there are hesitations in Proudhon’s thinking, they are found especially in The General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century (1851), in The Social Revolution
1864, was, between the death of Proudhon and the Commune, exclusively in the hands of the Proudhonians: there were only two Marxists before the Commune. At that time, Marx advised the French workers to be cautious, while the Proudhonians called the French working class to revolution. I do not mean to say that if one favours patience, like Marx, or an immediate revolution, like the Proudhonians, one side is always wrong and the other is always right. I simply want to emphasise that it is unfair to the Proudhonians to claim that Proudhon represented the bourgeoisie’s fear, when in reality he had a much more revolutionary spirit than Marx.

Revolutionary syndicalism has been mentioned here. I agree strongly with Mrs Kriegel – but in my opinion, without Proudhon there would have been no revolutionary syndicalism. Revolutionary syndicalism is a product of Proudhonism, and could not have existed without Proudhonism. Mrs Kriegel also spoke of the failure of revolutionary syndicalism during the 1914 war. But she focused on the French perspective. France, however, is not the only country where the problems of revolutionary syndicalism have arisen. I am thinking in particular of another country, of which I am a native, Russia, where these problems took shape as early as 1905 with the creation of the first workers’ councils. They arose a second time under Kerensky’s provisional government, then a third time under the Soviet government, and I can attest to the extraordinary penetration of Proudhonian ideas, both among Russian intellectuals and among Russian workers’ unions. For my part, it was not in France, but in Russia, that I became a Proudhonian, and I came to France to deepen my knowledge of Proudhon. I therefore bear a direct personal testimony. The first Russian soviets were organised by Proudhonians, the Proudhonians who came from the left-wing elements of the Socialist Revolutionary Party or the left-wing of Russian social democracy. It was not from Marx that they could take the idea of revolution by the base soviets, because it was an essentially, exclusively, Proudhonian idea. As I am one of the organis-
cannot last, but that pushes in two directions: towards *industrial empire*, and then *industrial democracy*. ‘Industrial empire’ is a very accurate description of what happened under Napoleon III, because Napoleon III was nothing other than the head of the trusts and cartels. Proudhon speaks with justified hostility of the Saint-Simonian ‘bankocrats and industrial despots’ who, forming the Emperor’s entourage, were entrusted with carrying out immense works and established big industry in France. He predicts that the ‘industrial empire’ will not hold, that it cannot last. He believes that we will go directly from ‘industrial empire’ to ‘industrial democracy’, and this is where his optimism comes in. He makes events flow far more quickly than they do in reality, and, speeding through the various stages of capitalism, he predicts the triumph of ‘industrial democracy’, one of the essential elements of which is worker self-management. Obviously, this is going a bit too fast. In any case, the great merit of the third edition of the *Stock Market Speculator’s Manual* is the definition of the different phases of capitalism. And, from another perspective, it is also the premonition of the not only Caesarean, but fascistic or even openly fascist aspect of organised capitalism that had already started to become frightened of the labour movement.

We have spoken here about Proudhon’s frequent reservations about strikes or, as he said, ‘coalitions’. I would note that if he was against strikes, against ‘coalitions’, it was only because he thought the times were not ripe enough. And I will cite a text to you to support my comments, a passage in the second volume of *Justice in the Revolution and in the Church* where Proudhon declares: ‘If the bosses agree, if the companies merge, the public authorities can do even less about it because power promotes and encourages the centralisation of capitalist interests. But if the workers, who feel the right bequeathed to them by the Revolution, protest and strike, their only means of having their claims recognised, they are punished, transported without mercy, deported to Cayenne and Lambessa’ (p. 77). You can see that already, in 1858, Proudhon’s attitude towards strikes is not at all that for which he is usually criticised.

For my part, I believe that Proudhon’s most important work on political doctrine is his last book, which he completed at his deathbed: *The Political Capacity of the Working Classes* (1865), which remains, of all his works, the one that is closest to Marxism. Not only does Proudhon draw a clear distinction between the economic and political capacity of the working class, but he goes much further, so far that it surely lies much further to the left than today’s Marxists. Indeed, he asks why, since the bourgeoisie had the right to separate themselves from the working class, the working class would not have the right to separate themselves ‘consciously’ from the bourgeoisie? He calls for a policy of boycotting all political institutions, not because they are political institutions but because they are bourgeois institutions. He therefore preaches a radical policy of ‘separation’, which is an absolutely revolutionary policy. Going much further than all the Marxist theorists, he appeals to the proletarian class for permanent war until victory.

As always, one can reproach Proudhon for his unrepentant optimism here. He claims that the bourgeoisie is virtually dead, that it is just a rabble without any moral and political ideas, and that it only remains thanks to its economic interests; that, under these conditions, a revolutionary practice of total separation of the working class, boycotting the bourgeois political government, can quickly dominate the bourgeois class. In other words, he expects a social revolution in the very near future. He dictated the last sentences of this political will, *The Political Capacity of the Working Classes*, a few weeks, a few days before his death. It is easy to guess that what he foresees, what he sees coming, is the Commune. Indeed, most communards were Proudhonians. We know that Proudhon’s friends played a decisive role in the Commune. We must also recall that the French section of the International Workingmen’s Association, organised by Marx in