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Integration through Science? Nationalism and Internationalism in the German Monist Movement (1906 – 1918)

Throughout the "long" nineteenth century, various actors and organizations of European freethought shaped ideas of modern and secular nationhood.[1] As recent studies have shown, nineteenth-century secularism was far from being anti-religious or atheist in general. On the contrary, secularism "was a manifestation of a highly religious age."[2] Freethinkers in Germany, France, Italy, and Spain fought for a new concept of religion that was "more suited to a society undergoing rapid changes."[3] Although freethinkers established a transnational network based on the circulation of anti-Catholic books, journals, images, and codes, long-term cooperation between freethinkers was constrained by the political and national framework of their home countries. The failure of the Anti-Council, organized by secularists, atheists, and freemasons in 1869 in order to protest against the First Vatican Council (1870), is one prominent example of the obstacles European freethinkers were faced with once they strove to collaborate beyond national borders.[4]

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1 On the history of European anticlericalism, see Manuel Borutta, *Antikatholizismus: Deutschland und Italien im Zeitalter der europäischen Kulturkämpfe* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, [2]2011); and Lisa Dittrich, *Antiklerikalismus in Europa: Öffentlichkeit und Säkularisierung in Frankreich, Spanien und Deutschland (1848 – 1914)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014). On the history of freethinkers in Germany, Great Britain, and the US, see Edward Royle, *Radicals, Secularists and Republicans: Popular Freethought in Britain, 1866 – 1915* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980); Susan Jacoby, *Freethinkers:* A *History of American Secularism* (New York: Henry Holt, 2005); Todd Weir, *Secularism and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Germany: The Rise of the Fourth Confession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); and Michael Rectenwald, *Nineteenth-Century British Secularism: Science, Religion and Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

2 Laura Schwartz, *Infidel Feminism: Secularism, Religion and Women's Emancipation, England 1830 – 1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 22.

3 Lisa Dittrich, "European Connections, Obstacles and the Search for a New Concept of Religion: The Freethinker Movement as an Example for Transnational Anti-Catholicism in the Second Half of the 19th Century," *Journal of Religious History* 39, no. 2 (2015): 261.

4 See ibid., 267 – 273. The Anti-Council was organized by the Italian freethinker and journalist Giuseppe Ricciardi.

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In an age of conflicting nationalisms, freethinkers envisioned a European public and developed an internationalist identity.[5] The *Fédération Internationale de la Libre Pensée* (International Freethought Federation, IFF), founded in 1880 in Brussels, expressed freethinkers' search for internationalism and provided a transnational forum for their exchange.[6] Yet ideas of internationalism not only promoted and shaped, but also challenged secularist identities, as the history of the monist movement in Wilhelmine Germany reveals. In their writings and speeches, German monists had to balance out national and international perspectives of their movement: Wilhelm Ostwald (1853–1932), president of the Monist League between 1911 and 1915, emphasized the importance of international cooperation in his writings, while praising the scientific and technological achievements of the German Empire.

The *Deutsche Monistenbund* (German Monist League) was founded in 1906 by the Zoologist Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919) and promoted a "totalizing worldview" based on scientific knowledge.[7] Haeckel's Monist League popularized what he called *wissenschaftliche Weltanschauung* (scientific worldview) in lectures, writings and the journal *Das Monistische Jahrhundert* (The Monist Century) as well as it opposed the influence of the Christian churches on Wilhelmine society. From the 1870s on, Haeckel started to publish popular books on Darwinism and evolution. Influenced by Darwin's and Lamarck's theories of evolution and Goethe's pantheism, he praised monism as a new "link between religion and sci-

5 On the creation of a European public among freethinkers, see Dittrich, *Antiklerikalismus in Europa*, 219–276; and Daniel Laqua, "Freethinkers, Anarchists and Francisco Ferrer: The Making of a Transnational Solidarity Campaign," *European Review of History* 21, no. 4 (2014): 467–484.
6 See Jeffrey Tyssens and Petri Mirala, "Transnational Seculars: Belgium as an International Forum for Freethinkers and Freemasons in the Belle Epoque," *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 90, no. 4 (2012): 1353–1372.
7 On the history of the monist movement, see Gangolf Hübinger, "Die Monistische Bewegung: Sozialingenieure und Kulturprediger," in *Kultur und Kulturwissenschaften um 1900*, vol. 2: *Idealismus und Positivismus*, ed. Gangolf Hübinger, Rüdiger vom Bruch and Friedrich Wilhelm Graf (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1997), 246–259; Olaf Breidbach, "Monismus um 1900 – Wissenschaftspraxis oder Weltanschauung?," *Stapfia* 56 (1998): 289–316; Paul Ziche, ed., *Monismus um 1900: Wissenschaftskultur und Weltanschauung* (Berlin: Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung, 2000); Eric Paul Jacobsen, *From Cosmology to Ecology: The Monist World-View in Germany from 1770 to 1930* (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 2005); Adrian Brücker, *Die Monistische Naturphilosophie im deutschsprachigen Raum um 1900 und ihre Folgen: Rekonstruktion und kritische Würdigung naturwissenschaftlicher Hegemonialansprüche in Philosophie und Wissenschaft* (Berlin: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2011); and Todd Weir, ed., *Monism: Science, Philosophy, Religion, and the History of a Worldview* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

ence."[8] In his 1899 highly influential and bestselling book *Die Welträtsel* (The Riddles of the Universe) he worked out his monist philosophy for a broader public and claimed the unity of spirit and matter.[9]

The Monist League was shaped by the tradition of European freethought and became a main representative of anticlerical and anti-Catholic radicalism in Germany. As president of the league, Ostwald started to publish short articles on philosophical, cultural, and political topics provocatively called "Monistische Sonntagspredigten" ("Monist Sunday Sermons").[10] In these sermons, Ostwald sought to unite the heterogeneous views of German monists under the umbrella of his own version of monism, which he referred to as *Energetik* (energetics). Whereas Haeckel was strongly influenced by the idea of evolution, Ostwald regarded natural phenomena as manifestations of energy.[11]

Although Ostwald envisioned monism as an international movement with science as its universal integrative force, the ideas of the German nation and culture remained powerful among monist thinkers. Thus I will argue that the self-perception of the German monist movement oscillated between a national and international identity. In other words, in German monism two conflicting concepts were at play – the universality of science and the particularity of the German nation. My understanding of internationalism is based on Glenda Sluga's account on "internationalism in the age of nationalism."[12] She defines the concepts of nationalism and internationalism as complementary to each other. Throughout the twentieth century, Sluga argues, these concepts were deeply intertwined and lastingly shaped ideas about national interdependence and sovereignty.

This essay starts with a short outline of the German Monist League, its history, agenda, and social goals. I will then examine Wilhelm Ostwald's concept of society and culture as living organisms that provided the conceptual background for his internationalism. The third part analyzes Ostwald's ambiguous attitude toward nationalism and internationalism. In the last section of this chapter I

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8 Ernst Haeckel, *Monismus als Band zwischen Religion und Wissenschaft: Glaubensbekenntniss eines Naturforschers* (Bonn: Emil Strauss, 1893), 9–46.

9 Haeckel's *Riddles of the Universe* sold over 340,000 copies in 1918; see Hübinger, "Die monistische Bewegung," 246.

10 See Wilhelm Ostwald, *Monistische Sonntagpredigten*, 5 vols. (Leipzig: Unesma, 1912–1915).

11 See Wilhelm Ostwald, *Die Überwindung des wissenschaftlichen Materialismus* (Leipzig: Veit & Comp, 1895). On Ostwald's energetic monism, see Caspar Hakfoort, "Science Deified: Wilhelm Ostwald's Energeticist World-View and the History of Scientism," *Annals of Science* 49, no. 6 (1992): 525–544.

12 Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

will show how his internationalist attitude changed after the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Subsequently, I will ask in how far Ostwald's shift toward nationalism came as a sudden change of heart. My conclusion refers again to the issue of secularity, discussing, whether monists contributed to the concept of the secular in Germany.

The Monist Movement in the German Empire (1906–1918)

Although the term "monism" dates back to the eighteenth century, it gained popularity particularly during the nineteenth century, when German secularists and freethinkers chose it to label their movement.[13] It was during Enlightenment that the German philosopher Christian Wolff introduced monism in a treatise from 1721 to describe pantheism and philosophical systems opposing Christian dualism.[14] Ernst Haeckel, professor of zoology in Jena, revived this terminology and popularized monism as a new scientific *Weltanschauung*. Linguist August Schleicher (1821–1868) inspired him to use the term in an open letter from 1863:

> The direction of modern thought inevitably leads us to monism. The dualism, either understood as the opposition of spirit and nature, content and form, or essence and appearance, has become an outdated point of view for the natural sciences.[15]

While Haeckel started his scientific career as an evolutionary morphologist and a strong defender of Darwinism in the 1860s, he dedicated his later work to his monist philosophy. From the 1890s on, his monism adopted characteristics of panpsychism, claiming a consciousness in all natural phenomena and the identity of matter and force.[16] This shift became evident in Haeckel's notion of *Theophysis* which he used to emphasize nature's creative power.[17]

13 See Horst Hillermann, "Zur Begriffsgeschichte von Monismus," *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 20 (1976): 214–235; and Jacobsen, *From Cosmology to Ecology*, 9–90.
14 See Weir, "Riddles of Monism," 5.
15 Heinrich Schmidt, ed., *Was wir Ernst Haeckel verdanken*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Unesma, 1914), 149. In the late nineteenth century, the term "Weltanschauung," according to Todd Weir, characterized "a systematic understanding of the world as a meaningful totality that formed the basis of a community." (Weir, "Riddles of Monism," 13.) If not otherwise indicated, all translations are the author's.
16 See Niles Holt, "Ernst Haeckel's Monistic Religion," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 32, no. 2 (1971): 279.
17 See ibid.; and Kleeberg, *Theophysis*.

In his 1899 bestseller *The Riddle of the Universe*, Haeckel introduced his *Substanzgesetz* (law of substance) which he derived from the principles of mass and energy conservation. According to Haeckel, matter and force were two modes of the same hypothetical substance at the base of the universe. This law, he wrote, was "just as much an irrevocable principle " in the sciences "as the dogma of the papal infallibility is for the Catholic Church."[18] Although contemporaries declared Haeckel to be the "German Darwin," his monism was equally reminiscent of Goethe's pantheism and romantic natural philosophy.[19] In that sense, monism not only figured as an "intrusion" of science into the realms of philosophy and religion but also as an "intrusion" of a new worldview into the realm of science, as Todd Weir noted.[20]

As already mentioned, Haeckel set up the German Monist League in Jena in early 1906.[21] Albert Kalthoff, a left-liberal pastor from Bremen, became the league's first president. Haeckel, who was already 72 at that time, felt too old to take over the organization's presidency and declared himself honorary president. Two years earlier, however, he had been appointed the scientific "antipope" at the International Conference of Freethinkers in Rome – a provocative gesture directed against the head of the Catholic Church.[22]

Haeckel approached Wilhelm Ostwald in December 1910 to offer him the leadership of his league, a strategic move, since Ostwald was a famous scientist who had been awarded the Nobel Prize in 1909 for his research on chemical catalysis. Ostwald accepted the offer and started to promote his own version of monist thought called "energetics."[23] Based on his reading of the first law of thermodynamics (energy conservation), Ostwald assumed that the physical world was driven by self-preserving energy. He therefore believed that energy – not matter – "was fundamental to the universe."[24] In his memoirs, Ostwald summa-

18 Ernst Haeckel, "Die Wissenschaft und der Umsturz," *Die Zukunft* 10 (1895): 199.
19 See ibid., 265; and Kleeberg, "God-Nature Progressing: Natural Theology in German Monism," *Science in Context* 20, no. 3 (2007): 537–569.
20 Weir, "Riddles of Monism," 14.
21 See Rosemarie Nöthlich, ed., *Substanzmonismus und/oder Energetik: Der Briefwechsel von Ernst Haeckel und Wilhelm Ostwald (1910 bis 1918), Zum 100. Jahrestag der Gründung des Deutschen Monistenbundes* (Berlin: Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung, 2006), 9–20. On the life and work of Ernst Haeckel, see Mario A. Di Gregorio, *From Here to Eternity: Ernst Haeckel and Scientific Faith* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005); and Robert J. Richards, *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
22 See Nöthlich, *Substanzmonismus*, 9–10.
23 See Hakfoort, "Science Deified," 525–544.
24 Holt, "Ostwald's Energeticism," 369.

rized his insight as follows: "What if energy had primary existence and matter was only a secondary product of energy – a complex of different energies?"[25]

Referring to the second law of thermodynamics (entropy), he maintained that the transformation of free energy into a fixed "saturated" state was irreversible.[26] He therefore called for a new approach to ethics, summarized in the energetic imperative: "Vergeude keine Energie, nutze sie!" ("Don't waste energy, utilize it!")[27] The approaches popularized by Haeckel and Ostwald found a vivid echo among the German public. Thanks to Haeckel's and Ostwald's popular writings, monism dominated the debates on the relationship between science and religion at the turn of the century.

Compared to other secularist organizations in the German Empire such as the *Ethische Gesellschaft* (Ethical Society) or the *Freidenkerbund* (Freethinker League) the Monist League became quite successful in terms of membership and impact. Under Ostwald's presidency, the league cooperated with several reform movements such as the *Gesellschaft für ethische Kultur* (Society for Ethical Culture), the *Bund für Mutterschutz* (League for the Protection of Mothers), and the peace movement in order to push through social and cultural reforms on many levels. One of the main goals of the Monist League was to abolish religious instruction in schools. In 1909, several major freethought organizations in Germany, amongst them the Monist League, founded the *Weimarer Kartell* (Weimar Cartel) with the purpose to unite and defend secularist interests.[28] By 1912, the Monist League had managed to attract about 6,200 members organized in more than 40 local groups throughout Germany.[29] While the leading ranks of

25 Wilhelm Ostwald, *Lebenslinien: Eine Selbstbiographie*, vol. 2: *Leipzig 1887–1905* (Berlin: Klasing & Co., 1927), 155.

26 Entropy is a measure of energy that is unavailable for doing useful work. It describes natural processes that are irreversible such as the melting of an ice cube within a glass of water. On the cultural history of energy conservation and entropy, see Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Elizabeth Neswald, *Thermodynamik als kultureller Kampfplatz: Eine Faszinationsgeschichte der Entropie* (Berlin: Rombach, 2003); and Daan Wegener, "A True Proteus: A History of Energy Conservation in German Science and Culture 1847–1914" (PhD diss., University of Utrecht, 2009).

27 Wilhelm, Ostwald, *Der energetische Imperativ* (Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, 1912), 99. Ostwald's "energetic imperative" is one example for the use and translation of scientific knowledge amongst members of the German monist movement. For further reading, see Christoffer Leber, "Energetic Education: Monism, Religious Instruction, and School Reform in Fin-de-Siècle Germany," *Yearbook of the Italian-German Institute in Trient,* Special Issue, *Science and Religion: Revisiting a Complex Relationship* 43, no. 1 (2017): 85–114.

28 See Horst Groschopp, *Dissidenten: Freidenkerei und Kultur in Deutschland* (Berlin: Dietz, 1997), 9–41.

29 See Weir, *Secularism and Religion*, 281.

the monist movement clearly belonged to the German *Bildungsbürgertum* – the educated upper middle class – urban middle-class teachers, merchants, engineers, and physicians formed its main body.[30]

Although the Monist League was a main actor of radical anticlericalism in Germany, its relation to religion remained ambiguous. While some philosophers and liberal theologians such as Kalthoff praised monism as a secular religion, others associated it with rationalist, even atheist notions.[31] Subsequently, monists expressed different, sometimes even conflicting concepts of the secular: for some, secularity aimed at the separation of state and church, while for others its purpose was to strengthen religious freedom against the dominance of the state.

Society as Organism

Monist thinkers such as Wilhelm Ostwald, Ernst Haeckel, and Franz Müller-Lyer regarded society as an organism that evolved along inherent laws. In drawing an analogy between the human social order and the biological organism, they followed a topos of their time present in scientific, popular, and political writings. In the nineteenth century, the state-as-organism metaphor was either used to compare the part-whole-relations of the body with those of a state, or to parallel animal states (mainly highly socialized species such as bees and ants) with human political organizations.[32] Originally, the term "organism" implied a principle of form and order present in the natural world.[33] Influenced by eighteenth-century natural philosophy, the notion later turned into a generic term for biological entities. Rudolf Virchow's conception of the body as a *Zellenstaat* (state of cells) was probably the most prominent example of the body-as-state metaphor in nineteenth-century popular science.

In his lecture on *Arbeitsteilung in Natur- und Menschenleben* (Division of Work in the Natural and Human Order, 1868), Ernst Haeckel already dwelled on the many ways in which nature fell back on cooperation to increase efficien-

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30 See Wilhelm Bloßfeldt, ed., *Der erste internationale Monistenkongreß in Hamburg vom 8.–11. September 1911* (Leipzig: Alfred Körner, 1912), 156.

31 See Lucian Hölscher, *Geschichte der Protestantischen Frömmigkeit in Deutschland* (Munich: C.H.Beck, 2005), 367.

32 See, for instance, Carl Vogt's use of analogies between the animal and the human state in his book *Thierstaaten* (Animal States, 1851).

33 See Tobias Cheung, "What is an 'Organism'? On the Occurrence of a New Term and Its Conceptual Transformation 1680 – 1850," *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences* 32 (2010): 155 – 194.

cy. Building on the state-as-organism metaphor, he asserted that the very essence of human political order was collaboration and the division of work: "All organisms, as well as animals and plants – except for the most primitive ones – are made of cells. The unity of every single living organism is, like the political unity of every single state, the result of the combination and cooperation between these smallest 'citizens.' They form the actual elementary organisms."[34]

Forty years later, Ostwald revived those ideas and made use of organic analogies to justify international cooperation, especially in science and technology. Just as the human organism depended on the cooperative work of cells, science hinged on the international cooperation of nations, he declared. In this, Ostwald's writings mirror the influence of the late-Enlightenment French philosopher Auguste Comte. Comte's positivism held that true knowledge was based exclusively on natural phenomena and empirical data. His "law of three stages" implied that each civilization ran through three phases of development, namely: the theological, abstract, and scientific (positivist) one. These stages, according to Comte, corresponded to the mental development of the human being.[35] While the theological stage fell back to personified deities, the metaphysical stage resorted to impersonal, abstract concepts such as "nature" or "reason." The most advanced stage of cultural development – the scientific one – relied on observation, experiment, and comparison to explain life in its totality. Comte's understanding of history was permeated by teleology and finalism, since he was convinced that each civilization would culminate in a scientific age.

Ostwald, who translated one of Comte's earliest works into German and also authored a biography on the French philosopher, took up this stage model. Unlike Comte, however, he referred to these stages as the social, individual, and organizational one.[36] According to Ostwald, at the lowest, most primitive stage of human culture, humans lacked any individuality and defined themselves solely as part of a group (or as Ostwald put it: a herd). At this level, human will was subordinated to group decisions, as was the case in the Middle Ages. Following this typology, the rise of capitalism and the French Revolution led to the second, individual stage of development. In this period, new concepts like individual freedom and human rights incited people to criticize traditional authorities

34 Ernst Haeckel, *Ueber Arbeitstheilung im Natur- und Menschenleben* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1869), 27–28.

35 On Comte's "organic doctrine," see Gerhard Wagner, *Auguste Comte zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 2001), 59–63.

36 See Wilhelm Ostwald, *Plan der wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten, die für eine Reform der Gesellschaft notwendig sind* (Leipzig: Unesma, 1914); and Wilhelm Ostwald, *Auguste Comte: Der Mann und sein Werk* (Leipzig: Unesma, 1914).

such as the Christian churches and absolutist rulers. The third and highest level of cultural development, Ostwald believed, was a synthesis of the former ones: the "period of organization." From that moment on, society would organize itself on a national and international level using the tools of science and technology. Due to better living conditions, the scientific and technological progress would also contribute to higher moral standards.[37] Instead of struggling for existence, people would help and support each other for the sake of progress, Ostwald asserted. His notion of "organization" echoed the functionality of the biological organism:

> The term organization refers to the fact that future mankind ascribes to the individual the same role as the cell to the organism of the human being. The cells are different from each other (thanks to individualism). But they are created and shaped in a way that they complete each physical function in a perfect way, be it the sensory function, digestion, or the muscle contraction, so that the overall performance of such a living being reaches far beyond that of an entity organized according to the principles of a herd, such as a coral colony.[38]

Ostwald envisioned the ideal state as an internationally embedded technocracy, in which scientists and engineers would control the affairs of their respective societies.[39] Although he condemned Catholicism – and Ultramontanism in particular – he compared his technocratic future vision to the internationally organized Catholic Church. Just as the church had gained control over society and mindset during the Middle Ages, the "international priesthood of the sciences" would become the leading political, moral, and cultural authority of the future, he concluded.[40]

Given these analogies, Perry Myers defined Haeckel's and Ostwald's political conceptions as those of a "priestly class of elite thinkers."[41] In his Sunday ser-

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37 See Wilhelm Ostwald, *Religion und Monismus* (Leipzig: Unesma, 1914).

38 Ibid., 53.

39 On the history and philosophy of technocracy, see Hermann Lübbe, "Technokratie: Politische und wirtschaftliche Schicksale einer philosophischen Idee," in *Politik nach der Aufklärung: Philosophische Aufsätze,* ed. Hermann Lübbe (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2001), 11–37.

40 Ostwald, *Religion und Monismus*, 75: "Was also die katholische Priesterschaft im Mittelalter schon angestrebt und vorübergehend erreicht hat, was aber durch irrationale Beschaffenheit ihrer Grundlagen notwendig alsbald verschwinden mußte, das wird die internationale Priesterschaft der Wissenschaft mit vollkommener Sicherheit und ohne die Anwendung äußerer Zwangsmittel in täglich umfassenderem Maße erreichen."

41 Perry Myers, "A Priestly Class of Thinkers: Monism between Science and the Spiritual in Wilhelmine Germany," in *Revisiting the "Nazi Occult": Histories, Realities, Legacies*, ed. Monica Black and Eric Kurlander (Rochester/New York: Camden House, 2014), 56.

mon dedicated to the question whether monism was a threat to the state or not, Ostwald seemed to prove Myer's point of an elitist self-image among those thinkers: "Only a permeation by monist thought," he argued, "can enable our governments and state leaders to act in favor of the state. Only this thought triggers in them the higher capability of *state organization* that is the solely fitting form of existence for our contemporary cultural humanity."[42]

The state-as-organism metaphor affected Ostwald's understanding of the secular profoundly. In his view, a secular society was only possible by pushing forward scientific progress and by detaching the "cultural organism" from its religious remains.

A Question of Loyalty: Monism, Nationalism and Internationalism

Up until the 1980s historians have argued that monism, and Haeckel's philosophy in particular, have paved the way for the racist ideology of National Socialism in Germany.[43] On this matter, Daniel Gasman pointed out in 1971: "In the Monist ideology, radical racial nationalism was coupled with a profound and aggressive denial of the political and social assumptions of bourgeois liberalism."[44] Yet, in recent years, historians have challenged this narrow view and offered a more differentiated, source-based reading of the relationship of monism, the German nation, and nationalism.[45] According to their findings, the Monist League's early public work was certainly influenced by ideas of racial hygiene, social Darwinism, and anti-Catholic propaganda; however, it took a "leftward turn" after the collapse of the liberal-conservative coalition in 1909, the so-called *Bülow-Block*.[46] Especially under Ostwald's presidency, members of the Monist League popularized Lamarckian theories and ideas of mutual aid which they linked to the energetic imperative.

42 Wilhelm Ostwald, "Ist der Monismus staatsgefährlich?," in *Monistische Sonntagspredigten* 3, 136. (English translation by Perry Myers.)
43 See Daniel Gasman, *The Scientific Roots of National Socialism: Social Darwinism in Ernst Haeckel and the German Monist League* (London: Macdonald & Co., 1971).
44 Ibid., 44.
45 See Robert J. Richards, "That Darwin and Haeckel were Complicit in Nazi Biology," in *Galileo goes to Jail and other Myths about Science and Religion*, ed. Ronald L. Numbers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 170 – 178; and Weir, "Riddles of Monism," 24 – 25.
46 See Weir, "Riddles of Monism," 6.

Yet, the history of German monism is characterized by a constant tension between "part" and "whole," between national and international claims. On the one hand, monists celebrated their scientific worldview as the new, integrative force to achieve complete national unity by asserting that science prevailed over personal interests, confessional differences, and political struggles. They even went so far to propose their scientific worldview as a solution to the Jewish question and anti-Semitism.[47] Once Jews would adopt the scientific worldview, monists argued, they would abandon their cultural and religious idiosyncrasies and become an integral part of the German nation. On the other hand, monists like Ostwald stressed the international character of their worldview by arguing that science was a universal endeavor beyond national borders.[48] Ostwald, for instance, imagined a future world in which scientists managed the affairs of the state and cooperated in a transnational "republic of letters."[49]

However, the tension between nationalism and internationalism inevitably raised the question of loyalty, especially in times of increasing nationalistic sentiments: should monism be considered a national or an international movement? Could a monist be an adherent of a universal scientific worldview and, at the same time, be a wholehearted, maybe even patriotic German citizen?

Although Ostwald envisioned monism to be an international movement, the idea of the German nation remained powerful in his writings. Roughly nine months after he had become president of the German Monist League, he organized the First International Monist Congress (1911) in Hamburg, which later generations of monists praised as a legendary success.[50] Ostwald was determined to present the Monist League as an international association during the Hamburg congress. The reality, however, differed completely from the picture he had hoped to convey, since most participants of the Hamburg congress were Germans or at least German-speaking. In order to stress the internationalism of monism, Ostwald invited world-renowned scientists such as the American biologist Jacques Loeb and the Swedish chemist Svante Arrhenius to lecture at the meeting.[51]

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47 See Hermann Schnell, "Die Zukunft der Juden im Lichte des Monismus," *Das Monistische Jahrhundert* 2 (1913): 311.

48 Ostwald, *Religion und Monismus*, 71: "Ebenso ist der Gesamtbetrieb der Wissenschaft gegenwärtig schon völlig international geworden. Jeder Tag bringt uns hier neue Fortschritte, die diesen praktischen Internationalismus der Wissenschaft in einzelnen organisatorischen Maßnahmen betätigen."

49 Ibid., 50 – 51.

50 See Bloßfeldt, *Der erste Internationale Monistenkongreß*.

51 Loeb gave a talk on the topic of "life" from the perspective of reductionist biology, whereas Arrhenius elaborated on the "universe."

Although Ostwald tried hard to stage the internationality of monism and even proclaimed the dawn of a "monist century," he wrote to his wife after the congress that the Monist League was about to turn into a successful "national movement."[52]

Prior to the First World War, Ostwald explicitly rejected any form of nationalism and chauvinism. In a monistic sermon on *Patriotismus und Internationalismus* (Patriotism and Internationalism, 1913) he compared nationalism to a primitive and backward level of culture:

> Chauvinism is nothing less than politics of raw violence applied to the lives of nations. Such kind of politics was possible as long as single nations (for instance the ancient Romans) surpassed others in technical-military respects. This policy will cease to exist, once all neighbors have reached the same level of technical development, which is currently the case in Europe. Chauvinism is a harmful ideology that needs to be eradicated by every single monist because it is one of the remains of our animal-like past.[53]

International cooperation, Ostwald maintained, was a decisive factor helping nations to advance their cultural levels by expanding their scientific and technological knowledge. He was convinced that internationalism would speed up the cultural development toward the stage of "organization," including improved living conditions and higher moral standards.

In order to legitimate the cultural importance of cooperation, Ostwald and other monists referred to Piotr Alexeyevich Kropotkin's evolutionary theory of mutual aid. The Russian biologist and anarchist Kropotkin opposed social Darwinist notions of the struggle for life. Instead, he stressed the value of mutual aid and its pragmatic advantages for the survival of organisms in the process of evolution. Following Kropotkin, Ostwald condemned nationalism as "cultural atavism" that would revive primitive ideas like the survival of the fittest. In order to avoid a nationalist rhetoric, he emphasized universal terms like "Menschheitskultur" ("culture of humanity") or "Menschheitsorganisation" ("organization of humanity").[54]

Coming from a scientific background, Ostwald was well aware that research depended on transnational exchange in order to save time, money, and resour-

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52 Wilhelm Ostwald to Helen Ostwald, Hamburg, September 11, 1911, ABBAW, Ostwald Papers, no. 5206: "Ich habe mit meinem Vortrag und sonst sehr grossen Erfolg gehabt und bin heute unzählige mal photographiert worden. Ich kann mich dem Eindruck nicht entziehen, dass wir hier am Anfang einer grossen nationalen Bewegung stehen."

53 Wilhelm Ostwald, "Patriotismus und Internationalismus II (29.11.1913)," in *Monistische Sonntagspredigten* 3, 271–272.

54 Ostwald, *Religion und Monismus*, 41.

ces. In the 1880s and '90s he was involved in the disciplinary formation of physical chemistry, experiencing from the outset that its success relied on transnational cooperation. He therefore founded a journal for physical chemistry in 1887, which he co-edited with his Dutch colleague Jacobus Henricus van't Hoff, and initiated the International Association of Chemical Societies in 1912.[55] His monist movement copied patterns and structures the academic natural sciences had predefined. Despite his involvement in early international scientific networks, Ostwald ranked German science and technology atop other nations. Against this backdrop, internationalism could be interpreted as part of an "olympic" competition, in which each nation sought to prove its scientific superiority.[56] Notably before 1914 the search for internationalism in the scientific community and nationalism were not mutually exclusive. According to Geert Somsen, international scientific institutions even fulfilled genuinely nationalistic purposes:

> While the new institutions were presented as vehicles for international cooperation, they were also meant to assess and acknowledge national scientific accomplishments. National achievements, after all, can only be measured by international standards, so some form of international organization was required for them to be recognized at all.[57]

Ostwald aspired more than just to pay a lip service when he promoted international cooperation: from 1907 on, he was involved in the transnational Ido movement, which sought to popularize a reform version of Esperanto – a universal language developed in the late nineteenth century to facilitate international communication and global exchange. Ostwald kept close contacts with the French mathematician Louis Couturat, founder and promoter of Ido, and became member of the Delegation for the Adoption of an International Auxiliary Language, founded in 1900 during the world's fair in Paris. Moreover, in 1912, he co-founded an office for international science organization and communication in Munich, called *Die Brücke* (The Bridge)[58] that strove to gather information on scientific projects on a global scale. It also supported Ido as the new *lingua*

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55 See Katharina Neef, *Die Entstehung der Soziologie aus der Sozialreform: Eine Fachgeschichte* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2012), 20.
56 The term "Olympic internationalism" was coined by Geert J. Somsen, "A History of Universalism: Conceptions of Internationality of Science from Enlightenment to the Cold War," *Minerva* 46 (2008): 361–379.
57 Ibid., 366.
58 In 1911, the Swiss entrepreneur Karl Bührer and the journalist Adolf Saager approached Ostwald asking him to fund the Bridge project. On the history of this project, see Niles R. Holt, "Ostwald's The Bridge," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 10 (1977): 146–150; and Markus Krajewski, *Restlosigkeit: Weltprojekte um 1900* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 2006).

franca of science and technology. The Bridge even proposed a standardization of paper and book sizes which Ostwald referred to as "world format."[59]

Ostwald's open and manifold commitment to internationalism, however, challenged the monist identity and raised questions about the actual goals of the Monist League. In 1913, the monist local group of Krefeld published an appeal in the monist weekly defending the uniqueness of German culture, language, race, and history against the arbitrariness of "cosmopolitanism." Monism, they argued, ought to channel its efforts toward the establishment of the "secular nation state" instead of pursuing the unrealistic ideal of a global "Kulturmenschheit" ("culture of humanity").[60] The editors of the monist weekly answered the Krefeld appeal by stating that a "cosmopolite" in the monist sense was not an unpatriotic "Weltbürger" ("world citizen") but someone who contributed to the "weltweite Menschheitsorganisation" ("worldwide organization of mankind").[61]

These tensions between the national and international self-image of German monists became evident in their attempts to connect their scientific worldview to a specific German cultural tradition. Ostwald, for instance, grasped monism as the historical successor of Martin Luther's sixteenth-century Reformation, depicting monism as the legitimate successor of Luther's legacy.[62] For Ostwald, monism had the potential to "purify" liberal Protestantism from its religious remains, turn it into a truly scientific worldview, and, consequently, realize the vision of a secular nation. As we can see, his secularist vision was intertwined with the cultural and confessional heritage of German history. Ostwald found evidence for the "new Reformation" in the radical theology of Carl Jatho, a pastor from Cologne who had been removed from office due to his allegedly monist teachings. Jatho, Ostwald emphasized, stood for a new kind of Protestantism that was about to turn into a scientific worldview once German culture and society would have abandoned their religious imprint.

Similarly to his colleague, Haeckel likewise located monism in the context of a specific German tradition. In his bestseller *Die Welträtsel*, Haeckel praised Bismarck as the "political Luther" who freed Germany from "clerical tyranny" during the culture wars of the 1870s.[63] According to Haeckel, monism was the com-

59 Ibid., 64–140.

60 "Zur Frage: Nationalismus-Internationalismus," *Das Monistische Jahrhundert* 2, no. 36 (1913): 1012–1013.

61 Ibid., 1013.

62 Hannah Dorsch, *Eine neue Reformation* (Jena: s.l., 1919).

63 Ernst Haeckel, *Die Welträtsel: Gemeinverständliche Studien über Monistische Philosophie* (Bonn: Emil Strauß, 1899), 378.

pletion of Luther's Reformation and Bismarck's culture war. Furthermore, he praised Goethe as the precursor of monist thought and with that took up on the contemporary appreciation of Goethe as a German national poet.[64] He included a whole range of Goethean quotations to his monist and popular scientific writings: the second volume of his *Generelle Morphologie der Arten* (General Morphology of Organisms, 1866) opens with a quotation taken from Goethe's *Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen* (Metamorphosis of Plants, 1798) reading: "All figures are similar, and none equals the other. And so the choir points to a hidden law, to a holy riddle!"[65] Even thirty years later, Haeckel's most prominent work *Die Welträtsel* was permeated by allusions to Goethe and Goethean aphorisms.

Also Ostwald drew from Goethe's poetry and natural philosophy: following a famous quote taken from Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years, 1821), Ostwald entitled his collection of monist essays *Die Forderung des Tages* (The Challenge of the Day, 1910).[66] To him, this quote summarized the everyday importance of his energetic imperative: "Don't waste energy, utilize it!" Moreover, he showed special interest in Goethe's theory of color and devoted two monist Sunday sermons to Goethe's journeys to Italy.[67] Ostwald also referred to Goethe's poetry in his secular practices. When his grandchildren Fritz Ostwald and Hellmut Brauer received a *Kinderweihe* (a monist "baptism"), he suggested to include Goethe's poem *Kophtisches Lied* (Coptic Song, 1827) to the ceremony. Ostwald ended the ritual with the following words, which underline the commitment of monists both to the German nation and the global community: "We Monists are Germans, as we are Europeans [...] because we know that our immediate surroundings are able to exist as long as they blend in harmonically with the largest entity we live in: the whole of mankind."[68]

64 See Olaf Breidbach, "Monismus, Positivismus und deutsche Ideologie," in *Biologie, Psychologie und Poetologie: Verhandlungen zwischen Naturwissenschaft und Literatur*, ed. Walburga Hülk and Ursula Renner-Henke (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005), 55–70.
65 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen," in *Musen-Almanach für das Jahr 1799*, ed. Friedrich Schiller (Tübingen: Cottaische Buchhandlung, 1799), 17–23: "Alle Gestalten sind ähnlich und keine gleichet der andern; Und so deutet der Chor auf ein geheimes Gesetz, Auf ein heiliges Räthsel!"
66 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethes Werke: Hamburger Ausgabe*, vol. 12, ed. Erich Trunz (Munich: C.H.Beck, 1981), 517–518: "Was aber ist deine Pflicht? Die Forderung des Tages."
67 See Wilhelm Ostwald, "Goethe in Italien I (31.5.1915)," in *Monistische Sonntagspredigten* 5, 449–462.
68 Ostwald, "Kinderweihe," in *Monistische Sonntagspredigten* 5, 220.

The First World War: From Internationalism to Nationalism?

With the outbreak of the First World War, the monist movement underwent considerable changes. Tensions between pacifists and nationalists started to burden the identity of the movement. After years of active collaboration with pacifist circles, Ostwald radically altered his opinion: in October 1914, he and Haeckel signed the public *Manifest der 93* (Appeal of 93 professors to the Civilized World) refusing the accusations by the Allies. Instead, the signatories presented the German emperor Wilhelm II as a defender of peace:

> *It is not true* that Germany is guilty of having caused this war. Neither the people, the government, nor the Kaiser wanted war. Germany did her utmost to prevent it; for this assertion the world has documental proof. Often enough during the twenty-six years of his reign has Wilhelm II shown himself to be the upholder of peace, and often enough has this fact been acknowledged by our opponents.[69]

Ostwald, the former spokesmen of the international Ido movement, now advocated for a new planned language called *Weltdeutsch* (World German). In his Sunday sermon on the introduction of the new auxiliary language he stated:

> I propose to produce a simplified German on a scientific-technical basis for practical use in those areas [i.e. newly occupied countries]. In this, all dispensable variations, all of the aesthetically charming richness of the language which complicates its learning so tremendously, must be removed so that this new means of communication, for which I propose the name *Weltdeutsch*, can be learned and used by everyone with little effort.[70]

As Markus Krajewski puts it, Ostwald turned "from Paul into Saul" of the international language movement.[71] In September 1914, he even proposed a European confederation of states under German rule, replacing his former notion of a

69 German Professors, "To the Civilized World," *North American Review* 210, no. 765 (August 1919): 284–287.

70 Wilhelm Ostwald, "Weltdeutsch," in *Monistische Sonntagspredigten* 5, 557. English translation by Markus Krajewski, "One Second Language for Mankind: The Rise and Decline of the World Auxiliary Language Movement in the Belle Époque," in *Language as a Scientific Tool: Shaping Scientific Language across Time and National Traditions*, ed. Miles Alexander James MacLeod, Rocio G. Sumillera, Jan Surman and Ekaterina Smirnova (London: Routledge, 2017), 194.

71 Ibid.

peaceful cooperation among scientists in an internationalist setting.[72] Since Germany was the most advanced civilization in terms of science, technology, and military, Ostwald claimed during wartime, it was "chosen" to help other states – the Slavic nations in particular – to reach a higher stage of culture.[73]

Ostwald's apparent shift from internationalism to nationalism did not, as many historians have argued, come as a sudden change of heart.[74] On the contrary, his internationalist rhetoric carried undertones of national superiority right from the start, since he always regarded Germany and German monism as the embodiments of the highest level of culture and civilization: to him, Germany had already reached the stage of "organization." Even before the war broke out, Ostwald had praised Germany's "cultural blossoming" based on its scientific and technological achievements.[75] Yet the euphoria in the summer of 1914 further radicalized the nationalistic tendencies which became part and parcel of his ambivalent internationalism.

Ostwald's nationalistic Sunday sermons of late 1914 and 1915 further complicated his relationship with those monists who remained active pacifists. He started alienating himself from Rudolf Goldscheid, president of the Austrian Monist League between 1912 and 1917 and co-editor of Ostwald's *Annalen der Naturphilosophie* (Annals of Natural and Cultural Philosophy, 1901–1921), informing him in a letter from May 1916 that he preferred to edit the journal on his own because of "unbridgeable differences" in their political views.[76] Since Ostwald experienced increasing opposition by the pacifist wing of the Monist League, including Goldscheid himself, he decided to resign from his office. In 1915, he wrote to Haeckel: "My office is pretty difficult and tough these days. Whereas some think that I am not patriotic enough, others blame the Monist League for having almost turned into a war association."[77]

72 See Wilhelm Ostwald, "Europa unter deutscher Führung," in *Monistische Sonntagspredigten* 5, 161–192.

73 See Wilhelm Ostwald, "Das auserwählte Volk I und II.," in *Monistische Sonntagspredigten* 5, 465–495.

74 Braune, *Fortschritt als Ideologie*, 131–140. See also Hartmut Kästner, "Wilhelm Ostwald und der 1. Weltkrieg," *Osteuropa in Tradition und Wandel* 12 (2011): 58–73.

75 Wilhelm Ostwald, *Philosophie der Werte* (Leipzig: Körner, 1913), 268.

76 Ostwald to Goldscheid, May 30, 1916, in *Rudolf Goldscheid und Wilhelm Ostwald in ihren Briefen*, ed. Karl Hansel (Großbothen: Selbstverlag, 2004), 119.

77 Ostwald to Haeckel, February 23, 1915, ABBAW, Ostwald Papers, no. 1041.

Conclusion

The German Monist League was part of a broad spectrum of life and social reform movements in *fin de siècle* Germany. Yet still monists stood out because of their exceptional belief in science and progress. They promoted science and a scientific worldview as ways to advance mankind culturally – freed from any religious and dogmatic constraints. To achieve this goal, Ostwald and other monists called for international cooperation among scientists. Monism's self-image as a universal, international movement, however, was challenged by Haeckel's and Ostwald's recourses to specific German traditions in their search for monism's position in history.

Especially in Ostwald's popular writings the tension between scientific universalism and national particularism remained visible: on the one hand, Ostwald was eager to integrate internationalism into the monist agenda and emphasized his deep commitment to the artificial language movement, the peace movement, and "The Bridge". On the other hand, his internationalist rhetoric revealed an underlying nationalistic dimension based on the idea of Germany's scientific and cultural supremacy. This element became manifest in his attacks against the allegedly primitive cultures of the Slavic nations or the supposed backwardness of the Catholic countries in the European South.[78] Ostwald specifically relied on anti-Catholic stereotypes in order to create a common enemy and to strengthen the group cohesion of his movement.

At the same time, Haeckel and Ostwald nationalized monism by integrating it into a German historical narrative. Whereas Haeckel depicted Goethe – who had become a canonical German writer in the nineteenth century – as a pioneer of monist thought, Ostwald interpreted monism as the point of departure for a second Reformation completing Luther's legacy. When the First World War broke out in August 1914, their rhetoric turned increasingly nationalistic.[79] Ostwald's conversion from "Paul to Saul" of internationalism, however, came not as a sudden change of heart: rather, the outbreak of the war only made visible the ambivalent identity of monism in which nationalism and internationalism merged.

This tension between nationalism and internationalism raises the question of whether monism contributed to a specific German path to secularity. The answer is twofold: for one thing, monists were part of a European anticlerical dis-

78 See, for instance, Wilhelm Ostwald: "Wie kam das Böse in die Welt?," in *Monistische Sonntagspredigten* 1, 9 – 16.
79 See Ostwald, "Europa unter deutscher Führung," 161 – 192.

course which claimed the separation of church and state, the secularization of schools, and the strengthening of individual rights. Then again, German monists believed their movement would be destined to continue a vision of emancipation inherent to German culture. It was their mission to continue and finalize the legacies of Luther and Goethe, paving the way to a modern and secular German nation.

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Archive of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Science, Berlin (ABBAW)
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Daniel Laqua

"The Most Advanced Nation on the Path of Liberty": Universalism and National Difference in International Freethought

When William Heaford, a key figure in Britain's National Secular Society, introduced a new section on "Freethought in Other Lands" for the periodical *The Freethinker*, he argued that the movement should not be seen through a national lens: "The glory of Freethought shines forth in the fact that it is not [...] a mere by-product of the English intellect, or some casual parochial characteristic chained down to a particular spot, or rooting itself to some eccentric local centre of manifestation." Instead, freethought was "cosmopolitan, international, and widespread as civilisation itself."[1] Such statements were far from exceptional. Protagonists of international freethought frequently stressed the universal nature of their cause when promoting their vision of secularity. In analytical terms, their agenda was associated with a particular "dynamic of secularization" one that, according to José Casanova's words, "aims to emancipate all secular spheres from clerical-ecclesiastical control."[2]

Professions of unity among freethinkers must not be taken at face value. Although their ideas and actions had cosmopolitan features, these were subject to many boundaries.[3] This chapter examines how freethinkers sought to construct the universality of their cause while expressing notions of national difference, either explicitly or implicitly. An investigation of these ambivalences is particular relevant because recent literature has highlighted the existence of "multiple secularities" and different "secularisms."[4] While such work has drawn particular attention to non-Western categories and experiences, the debates within the IFF shed light on pluralities even within European settings. As such, the case of the

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1 William Heaford, "Freethought in Many Lands: Bohemia," *The Freethinker*, June 7, 1908, 362.
2 José Casanova, "The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms," in *Rethinking Secularism*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 54 – 74.
3 I have discussed these dimensions in Daniel Laqua, "Kosmopolitisches Freidenkertum? Ideen und Praktiken der Internationalen Freidenkerföderation von 1880 bis 1914," in *Bessere Welten: Kosmopolitismus in den Geschichtswissenschaften*, ed. Bernhard Gißibl and Isabella Löhr (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2017), 193 – 221.
4 Marian Burchardt, Monika Wohlrab-Sahr and Matthias Middell, eds, *Multiple Secularities Beyond the West: Religion and Modernity in the Global Age* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2015); Casanova, "The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms."

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organization reveals overlaps and intersections between different ways of framing "the secular" as a sphere and objective.

Recent work on anti-Catholicism and the culture wars of the late nineteenth century has stressed the need to look beyond specific national contexts, as these conflicts amounted to "a Pan-European phenomenon" that "demands an all-European and comparative perspective."[5] In view of wider antagonisms around state–church relations, the opposing camps developed transnational links. In the 1870s and 1880s, the Roman Catholic Church had started to establish new transnational structures, for instance the Catholic Defense Committee (1870–1878), which served as a "Black International," and the *Union de Fribourg* (Fribourg Union, 1885–1891), a body dedicated to Catholic enquiry into social and economic questions.[6] Freethinkers' efforts to work across national divides also intensified in this period. To some extent, their international cooperation occurred as part of their competition with religious forces, yet it also needs to be understood within a wider context: the late nineteenth century was an age in which processes of global integration went together with the development of new international structures and organizations.[7] In 1880, freethinkers from different countries created the *Fédération Internationale de la Libre Pensée* (International Freethought Federation, IFF) as a joint vehicle for advancing their cause. For half a century, the federation held international congresses and facilitated contacts between national freethought organizations.

The IFF is well suited to exploring commonalities and differences in secularist movements for several reasons. First of all, while freethinkers proclaimed their unity, the promotion of "freethought" had different meanings within differ-

5 Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser, "Introduction: The European Culture Wars," in *Culture Wars: Secular–Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3. See also Manuel Borutta, *Antikatholizismus: Deutschland und Italien im Zeitalter der europäischen Kulturkämpfe* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010); Lisa Dittrich, *Antiklerikalismus in Europa: Öffentlichkeit und Säkularisierung in Frankreich, Spanien und Deutschland (1848–1914)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014).

6 Emiel Lamberts, ed., *The Black International, 1870–1878: The Holy See and Militant Catholicism in Europe* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002); Vincent Viaene, "Nineteenth-Century Catholic Internationalism and its Predecessors," in *Religious Internationals in the Modern World: Globalization and Faith Communities since 1750*, ed. Abigail Green and Vincent Viaene (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 82–110.

7 Emily S. Rosenberg, "Transnational Currents in a Shrinking World," in *A World Connecting: 1870–1945*, ed. Emily S. Rosenberg (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 850–996. See also Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt: Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: C.H.Beck, 2009), 723–735; Johannes Paulmann, *Globale Herrschaft und Fortschrittsglaube: Europa 1850–1914* (Munich: C.H.Beck, 2019), chapter 5.

ent national contexts. As a result, the organization sought to construct and showcase a shared "essence" that was cast in universalist terms. Secondly, as a "Freethinkers' International," the IFF was a manifestation of the wider phenomenon of internationalism, which was intrinsically connected to ideas about nationhood.[8] National ideas – and different conceptions of the relationship between nationhood, statehood and secularity – thus formed an important subtext to freethinkers' discussions at international congresses. Even at an organizational level, this aspect was evident, as the IFF was based on the affiliation of national member organizations.

This chapter explores the interaction between universal claims and ideas of national distinctness at several levels. After sketching out key differences within the constituency of the Freethinkers' International, it considers the role of universalist tropes at international freethought congresses. In doing so, it draws particular attention to the way in which ideas about national pasts were entwined with conceptions of a universal struggle. The latter also manifested itself in the celebration of figures who were venerated as "martyrs" of freethought. Finally, the chapter explores these wider issues through the prism of a specific event, namely the IFF's Prague congress of 1907, which took place at a time when education and nationhood were major political battle grounds in the Habsburg Monarchy. As a whole, then, the chapter highlights a tension: while freethinkers sought to promote secularity through international channels, they often emphasized distinct national paths.

National Contexts for International Freethought

To some extent, it is possible to argue that freethought had international characteristics from the outset. After all, its key principles can be traced back to the Enlightenment, which had wider European features – even if they manifested themselves differently within individual national contexts.[9] Moreover, anticlericalism, which was common to many freethinkers, was in itself a transnational phenomenon, with the Roman Catholic Church serving as a major foil.[10] Even

8 Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

9 Margaret Jacob, *The Secular Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019). On different national varieties, see the classic volume by Roy Porter and Mikoláš Teich, eds, *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

10 See René Rémond, "Anticlericalism: Some Reflections by Way of Introduction," *European Studies Review* 13 (1983): 121–126 as well as, more recently, Dittrich, *Antiklerikalismus in Europa*.

at the linguistic level, there were shared roots, as the British term "freethinker" had closely matching expressions in other languages. As Jacqueline Lalouette has noted, the French term *libre penseur* derived from the English word.[11] Meanwhile, there were similar expressions in other languages: *librospensador* in Spanish, *libero pensatore* in Italian, *Freidenker* in German, *vrijdenker* in Dutch and *fritänkare* in Swedish, to cite but a few examples. Hence, freethinkers had not only shared origins that they could point to but also corresponding terms by which they described their movement. Within the present volume, Daniela Haarmann further explores the terminologies and concepts associated with the promotion of secular ideas.

At its foundation in 1880, the IFF brought together freethought organizations from nine countries.[12] Over the subsequent decades, it expanded further, and from 1900 onwards, the organization maintained a secretariat in Brussels. Belgians played a prominent role in the IFF. In some respects, their participation reflected the strengths of Belgian freethought and the degree to which the question of church influence was subject to intense political conflicts in Belgium. At the same time, their involvement in the IFF formed part of a wider pattern of Belgian participation in international movements and organizations during this period.[13] Alongside Belgian freethinkers, the main freethought organizations from France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain all regularly contributed to the federation's work, while the involvement of other countries partly depended on the ebbs and flows of the movement in those countries.[14] By 1913, the IFF's council included representatives from sixteen countries; while largely European in its composition, Argentina, Brazil and Peru were also represented.[15] The organization's Eurocentricity was not specific to international freethought but rather reflected wider features of European internationalism before the First World War.

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11 Jacqueline Lalouette, *La Libre Pensée en France, 1848–1940* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997), 15.
12 Historical overview of "La Libre Pensée Universelle" in *Guide illustré dédié aux libres-penseurs qui assisteront au Congrès International et Universel de Bruxelles: 21, 22, 23 et 24 août 1910,* ed. Fédération Nationale des Sociétés de Libres-Penseurs (Brussels: Fédération Nationale, 1910), 21.
13 Daniel Laqua, *The Age of Internationalism and Belgium, 1880–1930: Peace, Progress and Prestige* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 80–114.
14 For a snapshot, see Fédération Internationale de la Libre Pensée, *Almanach-annuaire illustré de la libre-pensée internationale* (Brussels: Bureau permanent de la Féderation Internationale de la Libre Pensée, 1908).
15 Eugène Hins, *La Libre Pensée Internationale en 1913* (Brussels: Bibliothèque de *La Pensée*, 1914), 8–9.

Notwithstanding various shared aims, national differences affected the configurations and ideas associated with individual freethought movements. The development of distinct terminologies was a case in point. In Britain, "secularism" became a favored term for many groups and individuals that contributed to the IFF. The expression was historically recent, having been coined by G.J. Holyoake and promoted by Charles Bradlaugh to distinguish the members of the National Secular Society from less respectable "infidels" or "atheists."[16] Secularists accentuated the political dimensions of a commitment to the promotion of separation between church and state. Meanwhile, in France, the term *laïcisme* referred to the promotion of *laïcité* – a concept that had made its first dictionary appearance as an "activist neologism" in 1872.[17]

The example of *laïcité* illustrates that in some contexts, freethought could inform ideas about republican nationhood. In the French Third Republic, the role of the Radical Party as well as the Law on the Separation of the Churches and the State (1905) exemplified this aspect. Freethinkers were not only actively involved in the Radical Party, but also played a key role in shaping the ideas that led to the legislation of 1905.[18] Today, *laïcité* is enshrined in the French constitution; according to Jean Baubérot, to some extent it "now forms part of the French national 'patrimony'."[19] The French case is but one example of such connections. For instance, Susan Jacoby has noted that the United States were "a nation founded on the separation of state and church" while tracing a "tension between secularism and religion" that existed from the early days of the republic.[20] Meanwhile, in her study of European anticlericalism, Lisa Dittrich has drawn attention to national differences, noting that the close association between anticlericalism and republicanism in France and Spain was not mirrored in Germany.[21] Such ob-

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16 Edward Royle, *Victorian Infidels: The Origins of the British Secularist Movement, 1791 – 1866* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974), 145 – 169. On British secularism in the era of the IFF, see Edward Royle, *Radicals, Secularists and Republicans: Popular Freethought in Britain, 1866 – 1915* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980).

17 Pierre Fiala, "Les Termes de la laïcité: Différenciation morphologique et conflits sémantiques," *Mots: Les Langages du politique* 26 (June 1991): 48. Unless stated otherwise, all translations are the author's.

18 Lalouette, *La Libre Pensée en France*, esp. chapter 5. See also Jacqueline Lalouette, *La Séparation des églises et de l'état: Genèse et développement d'une idée (1789 – 1905)* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005).

19 Jean Baubérot, *Histoire de la laïcité française* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000), 3.

20 Susan Jacoby, *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004), 3 – 4.

21 Dittrich, *Antiklerikalismus in Europa*, 145.

servations suggest the existence of varying secularities that were informed by the religious and denominational make-up of the country in question.

Beyond the role of freethought-related discourses in specific national contexts, there were significant differences in the composition of the IFF's national constituents. In Germany, the *Freireligiöse Gemeinden* (free religious parishes) retained religious practices but were comprised within a broader conception of freethought.[22] This aspect was noted in the British periodical *The Freethinker*, in an article that described the "free religious" movement as "quite frankly and outspokenly Freethought," but noting its adherence to Christian beliefs and its retention of practices "which are, at best, but feeble imitations of church ceremony."[23] Another prominent feature of the German movement was the growing role of "proletarian freethought." Divisions surrounding the social question first became obvious at a national congress in 1908. One year later, Ida Altmann – a socialist and feminist – and Gustav Tschirn – a leader of the main freethought and "free religious" organizations – outlined their competing views in the IFF's *Almanach.*[24] Ideological differences ultimately affected the international movement as well.[25] In the present volume, Johannes Gleixner elaborates on this issue with regard to proletarian freethought during the interwar years. Both his chapter and Christoffer Leber's contribution shed further light on the national and political differences that shaped activism at the international level.

Although hostility to the Roman Catholic Church united the IFF, the practical implications of such views were shaped by the role of Catholicism within particular states and societies. In countries such as Belgium, France, Italy, Portugal and Spain, the battles of freethought were fought with particular severity because the stakes seemed higher, given the relative strength of the adversary. This difference was noted by William Heaford who, in viewing the "pamphlets

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22 Fédération Internationale de la Libre Pensée, *Almanach-annuaire illustré*, 60 – 61. For a detailed analysis, see Todd Weir, *Secularism and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Germany: The Rise of the Fourth Confession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

23 G. Caffrey, "Freethought Work in Germany," *The Freethinker*, June 5, 1911, 1.

24 Ida Altmann, "Les Entraves au mouvement de la libre pensée en Allemagne," and Gustav Tschirn, "Considérations sur les congrès nationaux allemands de 1908 et de 1909 des sociétés affiliées à la Fédération Allemande de Libres-Penseurs," both in *1909 Annuaire illustré de la libre-pensée internationale*, ed. Fédération Internationale de la Libre Pensée (Brussels: Bureau Permanent International, 1909), 19 – 25, and 28 – 30 respectively.

25 Daniel Laqua, "'Laïque, démocratique et sociale'? Socialism and the Freethinkers' International," *Labour History Review* 74, no. 3 (2009): 257 – 273. On the creation and debates within International Proletarian Freethought, see also Jochen-Christoph Kaiser, *Arbeiterbewegung und organisierte Religionskritik: Proletarische Freidenkerverbände in Kaiserreich und Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), 187 – 230.

issued against Christianity in Catholic countries," concluded "that our English ways are not as their ways, nor our methods of attack as their methods."[26] To Heaford, this was not a criticism: he concluded that it would be advisable to consider the views of "Freethinkers redeemed from the quackery of Protestantism – that illogical halting place on the road from Rome to Reason."[27]

In largely Catholic countries, freethought and freemasonry were often allied. For example, two of the IFF's leaders from Belgium, Léon Furnémont and Eugène Hins, were also freemasons.[28] In Portugal, Sebastião de Magalhães Lima served as Master of the Grand Orient of Portugal as well heading the main freethought association. A report on the IFF's Buenos Aires congress of 1904 observed that "[t]he full weight of the Lodges of Freemasonry was thrown into the scale in order to ensure the success of the congress."[29] Yet such links did not exist everywhere, partly because of major differences between national freemasonries. Pointedly, an IFF publication stated that "German freemasons are neither generally nor necessarily freethinkers."[30] In Germany and Britain, masonic lodges adhered to the notion of a "Great Architect" – ideas that sat uneasily alongside the anticlericalism of freemasons in several other countries. German and British lodges had responded negatively when the Grand Orient of Belgium removed the notion of the "Great Architect of the Universe" from its statutes in 1871.[31] Six years later, French freemasons took a similar turn towards the secular, creating further challenges for masonic internationalism.[32] Jeffrey Tyssens and Petri Mirala have suggested that "the more conservative and rather religious Freemasonry of the Anglo-American variety […] on one hand, and the politically radical

26 William Heaford, "The Lisbon Freethought Congress," *The Freethinker*, October 30, 1910, 694.
27 Ibid.
28 Jeffrey Tyssens and Petri Mirala, "Transnational Seculars: Belgium as an International Forum for Freethinkers and Freemasons in the *Belle Époque*," *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 90, no. 4 (2012): 1355.
29 William Heaford, "Freethought in Many Lands: South America," *The Freethinker*, June 28, 1908, 412.
30 Fédération Internationale de la Libre Pensée, *Almanach-annuaire illustré*, 60.
31 Hubert Derthier, "Libre pensée, franc-maçonnerie et mouvements laïques," in *La Belgique et ses dieux: Églises, mouvements, religieux et laïques*, ed. Liliane Voyé, Karel Dobbelaere, Jean Remy and Jaak Billiet (Louvain-la-Neuve: CABAY, 1985), 44.
32 Joachim Berger, "European Freemasonries, 1850 – 1935: Networks and Transnational Movements," *EGO – European History Online* (3 March 2010), http://ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/transnational-movements-and-organisations/international-organisations-and-congresses/joachim-berger-european-freemasonries-1850-1935. See also Joachim Berger, "Une institution cosmopolite? Rituelle Grenzziehungen im freimaurerischen Internationalismus um 1900," in *Bessere Welten*, ed. Gißibl and Löhr, 167 – 192.

and secular 'Latin' variety [...] on the other" constituted "two worlds with a completely antagonistic philosophical and political outlook."[33]

Such differences explain why we should treat any proclamations of unity with great caution. Freethinkers opposed church power and promoted the separation of church and state, but the commonality of their struggle did not make for a unified outlook. It was only at its 1904 congress that the IFF agreed on a definition of its subject, based on a motion by the renowned French pedagogue and politician Ferdinand Buisson. The compromise described freethought as primarily a "method" that rejected any form of dogma.[34] At the same time, it was characterized as *laïque, démocratique et sociale* – a phrase that became so closely associated with French political ideas that it ultimately made it into the constitutions of the Fourth and Fifth Republics (1946 and 1958). This connection is no coincidence: Buisson himself was a major figure in French republicanism and played a key role in shaping ideas about *laïcité*. A recent biography even refers to him as the "father of secular schooling."[35]

Celebrating Commonalities

If the differences between the protagonists of freethought were greater than some freethinkers were willing to admit, they also raise the question of how claims about universality could be upheld. One way of doing so was through international congresses. Between 1880 and 1939, the IFF held twenty-five such events, featuring discussions and deliberations that involved delegates from its national member organizations. Moreover, many congresses had popular dimensions in the shape of public debates, processions and demonstrations. On several occasions, IFF congresses took place against the backdrop of events at which national and universal imagery coexisted: in 1885 (Antwerp), 1889 (Paris), 1900 (Paris), 1910 (Brussels) and 1925 (Paris), freethinkers met in cities

33 Tyssens and Mirala, "Transnational Seculars," 1359 – 1360.
34 Fédération Internationale de la Libre Pensée, *Congrès de Rome, XX septembre 1904: Compte-rendu officiel* (Ghent: Volksdrukkerij, 1905), 183 – 196.
35 Patrick Cabanel, *Ferdinand Buisson: Père de l'école laïque* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2016). On Buisson's centrality, see also Jean Baubérot, *Laïcité 1905 – 2005, entre passion et raison* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2004), 13. On his transnational connections, see Klaus Dittrich, "Appropriation, Representation and Cooperation as Transnational Practices: The Example of Ferdinand Buisson," in *The Nation State and Beyond: Governing Globalization Processes in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Isabella Löhr and Roland Wenzlhuemer (Berlin: Springer, 2013), 149 – 173.

that, at the same time, hosted world's fairs, and the Amsterdam congress of 1883 coincided with the International Colonial and Export Exhibition.

With their changing venues, freethought congresses allowed the hosts to showcase national movements and emphasize their country's contribution to a shared cause. The 1889 congress in Paris, for example, evoked a connection between international freethought and the struggles of revolutionary France. While marking the centenary of the French Revolution, delegates also commemorated the Paris Commune by placing a wreath at Mur des Fédérés of Père-Lachaise Cemetery, where 147 Communards had been killed in 1871.[36] The anticlericalism of the French Revolution and the Paris Commune made them suitable for a freethought event, yet such commemorative acts also had a national dimension: the representation of the revolutionary past was closely entwined with particular visions of French culture, politics and society.[37] When freethinkers returned to the French capital in 1905, they renewed their earlier claims at a time when the French Senate prepared to vote on the French Law on the Separation of the Churches and the State. For instance, in the run-up to the congress, the organizers expressed their confidence in a strong turnout from their compatriots, stressing that an "important year" for the defense of republican values lay ahead.[38] The congress passed several other demands connected to French political debates, such as calling for the abrogation of the *loi Falloux* (1850), which had included provisions for schools run by religious congregations.[39]

At IFF congresses, speakers frequently praised the host nation for its positive historical role. In this respect, the gatherings in France were but one of many examples. For instance, at the 1910 congress in Brussels, IFF vice-president Georges Lorand described his home country Belgium as "the classic land of liberty and of the struggle for freedom of conscience."[40] That event coincided with the eightieth anniversary of national independence, just as the federation's foundation in 1880 had taken place fifty years after the Belgian Revolution. Indeed,

36 Commission du congrès, *Congrès universel des libres penseurs, tenu à Paris, du 15 au 20 septembre 1889: Compte-rendu officiel* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1889), 209.
37 Robert Gildea, *The Past in French History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 13–61.
38 "Aux congressistes français," *Bulletin officiel: Association Nationale des Libres-Penseurs de France*, no. 6 (April–June 1904): 10. For the political context, see Lalouette, *La Séparation des églises et de l'état*, 413–414.
39 Fédération Internationale de la Libre Pensée, *Congrès de Paris: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 septembre 1905 au Palais du Trocadéro: Compte rendu* (Paris: Secrétariat du Congrès de Paris, 1905), 146. On the *loi Falloux* of 1850, see Baubérot, *Histoire de la laïcité*, 44.
40 Fédération Internationale de la Libre Pensée, *Le Congrès de Bruxelles et la manifestation Ferrer, 20–24 août 1910* (Brussels: G. Meert, 1910), 38.

in some respects, prominent involvement in the IFF exemplified the way in which some Belgians cast internationalism as a national project.[41] Another example of the host country's celebration was the IFF congress of 1913. Held in Lisbon, it took place three years after the republican revolution in which freethinkers and freemasons had played a leading role. Hosts and guests alike paid tribute to the way in which Portugal had seemingly accomplished many of the movement's aims.[42] In issuing an invitation to the Lisbon congress, Magalhães Lima proclaimed: "Portugal is a small country. But the Portuguese Republic is a great Republic. And why? Because its advent was at once a moral and a global act, blessed by the attention and solidarity of the civilized nations."[43]

Speeches and pamphlets are one way of studying congresses, and Jacqueline Lalouette has summarized some of the themes that characterized the debates at IFF congresses.[44] However, ideas about universality and national distinctness were not only expressed in such formal terms, as congresses had manifold performative dimensions. The 1904 IFF congress in Rome illustrates this aspect. At this event, the ongoing struggle between *l'Italia laica* and *l'Italia cattolica*, the representation of the Risorgimento and transnational notions of combating ecclesiastical power became intermingled.[45] In 1905, the American freethinker John Byers Wilson – a physician from Cincinnati, Ohio – published a detailed account of his *Trip to Rome* and his experience of the 1904 congress.[46] Wilson was a major figure in Midwestern secularism, formerly head of the American Secular Union and, at the time of the Rome congress, leader of the National Liberal Party. The latter organization transformed itself into the American Freethought Association shortly after his return to the United States, partly inspired

41 Laqua, *The Age of Internationalism and Belgium*, 17–44. On the related issue of internationalism as a vehicle for Belgian foreign policy, see Madeleine Herren, *Hintertüren zur Macht: Internationalismus und modernisierungsorientierte Außenpolitik in Belgien, der Schweiz und den USA, 1865–1914* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2000).

42 Tyssens and Mirala, "Transnational Seculars," 1364.

43 Magalhães Lima, *Le Portugal libre penseur: De la monarchie cléricale à la république laïque* (Lausanne: Édition de la Libre Pensée Internationale, 1912), 5.

44 Jacqueline Lalouette, "Les Questions internationales dans les congrès de la Fédération universelle de la Libre Pensée (1880–1913)," *Cahiers Jean Jaurès*, no. 212–213 (2014): 119–133.

45 On the wider context of the Italian culture wars: Martin Papenheim, "Roma o morte: Culture Wars in Italy," in *Culture Wars*, ed. Clark and Kaiser, 202–226; and Borutta, *Antikatholizismus*, 120–150.

46 John Byers Wilson, *A Trip to Rome* (Lexington: James E. Hughes, 1905).

by the contacts made in Europe.[47] In Wilson's view, freethinkers were engaged in a universal struggle – "an eternal warfare between the selfish and powerful of humanity on one side, and the weak and ignorant on the other" – in which "Freethought, Science, and Education" were the "battlefield."[48]

Wilson's book provided extracts and summaries of the different reports and speeches at the IFF congress. In this respect, it included material that also featured in the official congress proceedings.[49] Yet in addition, his account is instructive in the way that it sought to capture the wider atmosphere. Wilson stressed the scale of the event while articulating both its national and its international features. In commenting on the opening, he noted that "the immense Cortile and galleries were crowded, and thousands were standing out on the Plaza." While there were delegates "from all the states of Europe," Wilson singled out the large number of French participants – allegedly two thousand – as well as three hundred guests from "enlightened, priest-ridden Spain."[50] On the first congress day, the organizers showcased the movement's strength through a public march to the Porta Pia, the place where Italian troops had entered Papal Rome in September 1870. According to Wilson, "[t]here were twelve to fifteen thousand in the procession, a band, two brigades of old Garibaldians in red shirts leading and the women numbering perhaps a thousand."[51] As a landmark event in the national unification of Italy, the Capture of Rome had been commemorated annually – but on this occasion, an episode from national history was transformed into an international affair: "Here were over five thousand patriotic spirits of other countries to join them in celebrating the triumph of conscience over superstition."[52]

The march to the Porta Pia was but one case of freethinkers putting a universal spin on phenomena that in other contexts were interpreted in national terms. The music at international congresses offers further examples. As Jacqueline Lalouette has observed, music played an important role at freethought events, with revolutionary tunes such as the Marseillaise offering "an expression of convivial-

47 Patrick W. Hughes, "American Freethought Association," in *Encyclopedia of Christianity in the United States*, vol. 5, ed. George Thomas Kurian and Mark A. Lamport (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 69.

48 Wilson, *A Trip to Rome*, 204.

49 Fédération Internationale de la Libre Pensée, *Congrès de Rome*, 5–220.

50 Wilson, *A Trip to Rome*, 145.

51 Ibid., 160.

52 Ibid.

ity."[53] While Lalouette's comments refer to the French *libres-penseurs*, similar observations apply to the international movement, as exemplified by repeated renditions of the Marseillaise at the Rome congress. For instance, after the German scientist Ernst Haeckel had completed his speech, a band launched into the tune, and "while thousands sang the inspiring song, banners and handkerchiefs were waved, all making a scene of enthusiasm, seldom witnessed."[54] On such occasions, the Marseillaise appeared not as a national anthem, but as a reference to the French Revolution's transnational ideals. This interpretation was far from unique to international freethought: the song had already been used in various parts of Europe during the Revolutions of 1848–49, and its reach extended into the German labor movement.[55]

The Marseillaise may have been exceptional in its symbolic power, yet it was not the only "national" tune that could represent a universal cause. For example, the *Brabançonne* – the Belgian national anthem that dated back to the revolution of 1830 – and the *Himno de Riego* – which commemorated Spain's Liberal Triennium (1820–1823) – were performed after Belgian and Spanish guests had given speeches at the IFF congress in Buenos Aires in 1906.[56] These renditions were more than nods to the nationality of the delegates: both songs were associated with national events that could be linked to a wider struggle for freedom. Moreover, the singing of different national tunes implied claims about the reach of freethought. During the procession to the Porta Pia, Wilson noted that as musical bands "played the national airs, and the Marseillaise, their music was drowned by the thousands of voices that joined in singing." To Wilson, it seemed that "all the Italians, French and German can sing."[57]

The culture of freethought congresses also included attempts to craft an explicitly international message. For example, the Parisian congress of 1905 featured a public recital of Lamartine's *Marseillaise de la Paix*. The latter was a poem written during Franco-Prussian tensions concerning the left bank of the

53 Jacqueline Lalouette, *La République anticléricale: XIXe – XXe siècles* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002), 398.

54 Wilson, *A Trip to Rome*, 150. Further mentions feature on pages 160, 196, and 284.

55 Axel Körner, *Das Lied von einer anderen Welt: Kulturelle Praxis im deutschen und französischen Arbeitermilieu* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2007), 237–240. On the history of the Marseillaise, see Hervé Luxardo, *Histoire de la Marseillaise* (Paris: Plon, 1989); and Frédéric Robert, *La Marseillaise* (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions du Pavillon, 1989).

56 The IFF congress in Buenos Aires, for instance, featured "Le Congrès de la libre pensée," *Courrier de La Plata*, September, 21, 1906, 1.

57 Wilson, *A Trip to Rome*, 160.

Rhine in the 1840s.[58] Lamartine's piece celebrated the river's transnational nature and promoted a cosmopolitan vision of Europe: "Egotism and hatred only have one fatherland / Fraternity has none!"[59] At the Paris congress, freethinkers also sang the *Internationale*, evoking links to the international labor movement.[60] Finally, in the 1930s, Renaud Strivay, a Belgian IFF leader, sought to create an international anthem with his *Chant des Libres Penseurs*. The song itself did not leave much of a trace but it is instructive in the framing of freethought, referring to past struggles but also the "dream of the glorious days / when reason and science will have secularized the heavens."

More generally, however, the culture of freethought congresses is notable in the way that it drew on traditions, repertoires and symbols that were not genuine to the movement itself. The reference to episodes from national pasts and the use of tunes such as the Marseillaise and the Internationale indicate that international freethought was often hitched on to concepts that were rooted in nationhood or in revolutionary politics. While on the one hand, this may seem like a limitation, on the other hand, it suggests that the international promotion of secular agendas could build on existing traditions and imagery, even when the roots of the latter lay elsewhere.

National Pasts and International Martyrdom

Renaud Strivay's *Chant des Libres Penseurs* described the point when "the world liberates itself from the detested servitude" as "Voltaire's revenge."[61] In this respect, the *philosophe* was not primarily portrayed as a French Enlightenment thinker but rather as the embodiment of a universal cause. The mention of Voltaire was one of many examples of freethinkers referencing figures from the past. Such worship was exemplified in the *Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers of all Ages and Nations*, written by Joseph Mazzini Wheeler, a British secularist journalist whose middle name paid tribute to the Italian republican leader Giuseppe

58 It was a direct response to the nationalist German *Rheinlied*. See René Garguillo, "La Marseillaise de Lamartine," in *Relire Lamartine aujourd'hui*, ed. Simone Bernard-Griffiths and Christian Croisiller (Paris: Éditions Nizet, 1993), 157–159.
59 Ibid., 160–165.
60 See e.g. Fédération Internationale de la Libre Pensée, *Congrès de Paris*, 93. On the *Internationale* and freethinking, see Lalouette, *La République anticléricale*, 406–407.
61 Renaud Strivay, *Union mondiale des libres penseurs: Bruxelles 1880 – Prague 1936* (Brussels: Imprimerie Henri Kumps, 1936), 141–142.

Mazzini.[62] Published in 1889, Wheeler's book presented an eclectic cast across more than 350 pages. For instance, the entries for the letter "A" featured Aristotle alongside figures such as the eleventh-century theologian Abelard and the Qarmatian ruler Abu Tahir, who led the sacking of Mecca in 930. These examples suggest an appropriation of past historical figures for a contemporary cause, evoking a perennial struggle between the forces of reaction and the power of reason. Likewise, John Byers Wilson evoked the memory of past figures when he described the Rome congress of 1904 as "the victory of all the great Pagan Moralists, the victory of Hypatia, Copernicus, Galileo, Bruno, Vanini, Voltaire, Rousseau, Paine, Shelley, and of every brave and loving soul, of their time, and since their day, who have given the thoughts of their brains to make men free."[63]

Of the different individuals who were singled out for commemorative activities, those who had suffered violent deaths – and could thus be cast as martyrs – featured particularly prominently at freethought events. As Wheeler put it: "Freethought boasts its notable army of martyrs for whom the world was not worthy, and who paid the penalty of their freedom in prison or at the stake."[64] In Italy, the philosopher and scientist Giordano Bruno enjoyed a special place in this imaginary pantheon, having been sentenced to death for heresy in 1600. Italian liberals and radicals saw Bruno as a symbol for their anti-ecclesiastical model of *Italianità*.[65] This dimension was highlighted by the erection of Giordano Bruno statues in several Italian cities governed by the left.[66] The most famous such monument was located in Rome at the Campo de' Fiori, the square where Bruno had been burnt at the stake. Having been inaugurated in 1889, the statue was both "a provocative symbol" that angered many Catholics

62 Joseph Mazzini Wheeler, *A Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers of all Ages and Nations* (London: Progressive Publishing Company, 1889).

63 Wilson, *A Trip to Rome*, 142.

64 Wheeler, *Biographical Dictionary*, iii.

65 On constructions of *Italianità* more generally, including the role of the secular therein: Silvana Patriarca, *Italian Vices: Nation and Character from the Risorgimento to the Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Carolin Kosuch, "Hygiene, Rasse und Zukunftstechnik: Paolo Mantegazzas Beiträge zur Italianità," *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken*, no. 97 (2017): 316 – 338.

66 See e. g. Mario Isnenghi, "La Place italienne," in *L'Italie par elle-même – lieux de mémoire italiens de 1848 à nos jours*, ed. Mario Isnenghi (Paris: Éditions Rue d'Ulm, 2006), 117 – 118. See also Bruno Tobia, "Urban Space and Monuments in the 'Nationalization of the Masses': The Italian Case," in *Nationalism in Europe, 1815 to the Present: A Reader*, ed. Stuart Woolf (London: Routledge, 1995), 171 – 191.

and "a venerated pilgrimage site among freethinkers."[67] The controversy surrounding the planned monument as well as its subsequent unveiling attracted international attention.[68] Published in the year of its unveiling, Wheeler's *Biographical Dictionary* noted the plans for a memorial to "this heroic apostle of liberty and light," claiming that "the principal advanced thinkers in Europe and America" had helped to fund it.[69]

The 1904 congress in Rome offered manifold opportunities to commemorate Bruno as an international martyr. Upon arriving in Rome for the event, John Byers Wilson spotted "a large lithography, about twelve feet high of Giordano Bruno, with the announcement of the coming Congress." Indeed, in the Eternal City, "Bruno loomed up everywhere. Where the walls were spacious enough, there would be two or three of these huge lithographs pasted thereon."[70] Independent of the formal congress program, British and American freethinkers decided to visit the Bruno statue. Having reached the Campo de' Fiori, they recited a poem that Walter Hurt, editor of the American periodical *Culturist*, had written prior to the trip. It denounced the Roman Catholic Church as "a Courtesan queen" that had "long sat superbly enthroned [...] while all of humanity groaned." A long litany of ecclesiastical misdeeds – including the way it had "offered the body of Bruno / to feed to the greed of the flame" – was followed by a more optimistic message: "No longer the Vatican voices / its rulings for all of the race / for reason now reigns and rejoices / in liberty's glory and grace."[71]

One day after the American and British visit to the Bruno statue, the IFF staged an official parade to the monument. Similar to the congress opening, the march featured "a long line of Garibaldi veterans, arrayed in the red uniforms in which they fought for Italian independence," followed by state troops.[72] On this occasion, the organizers eschewed the use of musical groups or flags as they sought to offer "a tribute to a citizen and man," rather than staging a procession of "a political or class character." Yet the participants did not require the musical accompaniment: having reached their destination, "the hymn of the Marsellaise [*sic*] arose and resounded upon the air." In Wilson's account, this expression offered a marked contrast to "the jeers and yells of the savage supersti-

67 Peter D'Agostino, *Rome in America: Transnational Catholic Ideology from the Risorgimento to Fascism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 70.
68 With regard to Britain, see Hilary Gatti, *Essays on Giordano Bruno* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 230–237.
69 Wheeler, *Biographical Dictionary*, 56–57.
70 Wilson, *A Trip to Rome*, 139.
71 Ibid., 186.
72 Ibid., 196.

tious mob" at the time of Bruno's death.[73] From the Bruno monument, the crowd moved onwards to a statue of Giuseppe Garibaldi. The reverence shown to the political and military leader can be interpreted in several ways. To Italian freethinkers, it served to legitimize their own concept of secularity at a domestic level, by associating their efforts with a figure who was venerated as a national hero. Yet the involvement of foreign visitors meant that Garibaldi was also appraised as a universal figure – taking up an element that had already featured in contemporary representations of him.[74]

One year after the events in Rome, the IFF congress in Paris marked the memory of another "freethought martyr," the Chevalier de La Barre. La Barre's case had been one of the *causes célèbres* of the French Enlightenment: in 1766, the nineteen-year-old nobleman had been burnt alive, with a copy of Voltaire's *Dictionnaire philosophique* around his neck, as a punishment for "sacrilege." Voltaire himself wrote about the "horrifying case" that "had appalled the whole of Europe (except for a few fanatic enemies of humanity)."[75] In 1905, the IFF congress began with a march that took an estimated 20,000 people – again with flags and music – to the unveiling of a monument dedicated to La Barre.[76] The location was significant: the statue was placed outside Sacré-Cœur, the enormous Catholic basilica whose construction had incensed many freethinkers. The memorial has therefore been interpreted as an attempt to "de-sacralize the site."[77] The La Barre monument was the second Parisian statue dedicated to a victim of clericalism: in 1889, the municipality had erected a bronze statue of Étienne Dolet – a sixteenth-century critic of the Inquisition – at the Place Maubert, the square where he had been burned to death on heresy charges.[78]

If figures from the past could be used to represent a universal and eternal struggle, freethinkers acquired a contemporary martyr figure when the Spanish authorities executed the anarchist and educator Francisco Ferrer on October

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73 Ibid.

74 Lucy Riall, *Garibaldi: Invention of a Hero* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).

75 Voltaire, "An Account of the Death of the Chevalier de La Barre," in *Voltaire on Tolerance and Other Writings*, ed. Simon Harvey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 139.

76 "Le Congrès de la libre-pensée: La manifestation du Montmartre," *Le Radical*, September 5, 1905, 1. From 1907, La Barre was also commemorated through another monument, located in Abbeville, where freethinkers gathered on an annual basis – see e. g. Eugene Hins, *La Libre Pensée internationale en 1911* (Brussels: Bibliothèque de *La Pensée*, 1912), 77.

77 Lalouette, *La République anticléricale*, 197.

78 Jacqueline Lalouette, "Du bûcher au piédestal: Étienne Dolet, symbole de la libre pensée," *Romantisme*, no. 64 (1989): 85–100. (Reprinted in Lalouette, *La Répulique anticléricale*, 201–223.)

13, 1909. Several recent studies have acknowledged the widespread international mobilization triggered by Ferrer's fate.[79] The Ferrer protests downplayed his political radicalism and focused on his work for secular education, casting him as a victim of Catholic reaction. Posthumous commemorations consolidated ideas about Ferrer as a martyr.[80] Memorialization efforts were particularly widespread on the first anniversary of his death. For example, the Italian *Associazione nazionale del libero pensiero "Giordano Bruno"* (National Freethought Association "Giordano Bruno") brought together 30,000 people who listened to speeches that praised Ferrer and joined together in cries of "down with the Vatican."[81] In Lisbon, the anniversary of Ferrer's death coincided with the first national freethought congress – held merely eight days after the Portuguese revolution had disposed of the monarchy. A British report on the Lisbon gathering commented on history's "strange coincidence," claiming that October 13 had also been the day when, back in 1541, "the Holy Inquisition was officially established in Portugal." This assertion was historically questionable, as the actual date had been May 23, 1536. But the statement allowed the periodical to integrate recent events into a wider historical narrative: "And thus the blood of the martyrs fructifies, and all the Ferrers slain in the evil past look down from the heights of their peerless immortality upon a world growing better and wiser because brave men dared to suffer and die."[82]

The IFF memorialized Ferrer through its congresses and by supporting the construction of a monument in Brussels. To William Heaford, the Ferrer monument was "more than a tribute in stone and bronze to a brave man": it highlighted "the martyrdom which Freethought and its heroes, teachers, and apostles have had to suffer at the hands of bigots." Moreover, it also pointed to "the martyrdom which may in future be inflicted upon Freethinkers if and wherever reaction raises its head of yore."[83] Ferrer continued to occupy a prominent place within IFF discourse. When the organization marked its fiftieth anniversary in

79 Kevin J. Callahan, *Demonstration Culture: European Socialism and the Second International, 1889–1914* (Leicester: Troubadour Publishing, 2010), 234–237; Daniel Laqua, "Freethinkers, Anarchists and Francisco Ferrer: The Making of a Transnational Solidarity Campaign," *European Review of History* 21, no. 4 (2014): 467–484; and Dittrich, *Antiklerikalismus in Europa*, 219–276.
80 For examples, see "World-Wide Movement to Honor Memory of Ferrer," *New York Times, Sunday Magazine*, July 31, 1910, 6.
81 Eugène Hins, *La Libre Pensée internationale en 1910* (Brussels: Bibliothèque de *La Pensée*, 1911), 9.
82 Heaford, "The Lisbon Freethought Congress," 694.
83 William Heaford, "Ferrer's Monument in Brussels – The New Crusade," *The Freethinker*, August 9, 1914, 506.

1930, delegates laid flowers at the Ferrer monument in Brussels.[84] A few years later, Strivay's *Chant des Libres Penseurs* proclaimed that freethinkers would "not rest until […] our sons live the dream for which Ferrer gave his blood."[85]

Representations of Ferrer as a universal figure coincided with a discourse that cast Spain as a despotic nation dominated by the clergy.[86] The IFF congress of 1910 exemplified this aspect. British freethinker John T. Lloyd reported that, at the event, "Ferrer's name was naturally linked with those of Counts Egmont and Horn, who had been cruelly massacred by Spanish tyranny three centuries earlier." Congress delegates gathered at the Grand-Place of Brussels, where a marble inscription stated that Egmont and Horn had been "beheaded in this square by order of Philip II for having defended liberty of conscience in 1568." Speakers explicitly likened the fates of Egmont, Horn and Ferrer. Moreover, the inscription was signed by "the International Committee appointed to commemorate the heroic death of Francisco Ferrer shot at Montjuïc for the same cause in 1909."[87] Lloyd acknowledged the limits of such comparisons, as Egmont and Horn "had many serious faults." Moreover, he also suggested that even in Spain, progress had been made since the days of the Inquisition, as "there are now to be found hundreds of thousands of stalwart Freethinkers, who are resolved, at whatever cost, to deliver their country from the bondage of superstition."[88] Nonetheless, as *The Freethinker*'s main correspondent on international matters, William Heaford continued to evoke images of Spanish reaction.[89] Ideas of Spanish distinctness were reinforced by unfavorable comparisons with Portugal. For instance, the IFF's secretary suggested that "whereas Spain finds itself plunged more than ever in reaction, liberated Portugal continues to march on the track of progress and is effecting the separation of state and church."[90]

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84 Strivay, *Union mondiale des libres penseurs*, 25.
85 Ibid., 71.
86 Dittrich, *Antiklerikalismus in Europa*, 256–264; Laqua, "Freethinkers, Anarchists and Francisco Ferrer," 472–474.
87 John T. Lloyd, "Freethought in Belgium," *The Freethinker*, September 11, 1910, 579.
88 Ibid., 579–580.
89 See, e.g., a series of articles written by William Heaford in 1912: "The Spanish Inquisition," *The Freethinker*, January 28, 1912, 52–54; "Spain and the Inquisition," *The Freethinker*, February 4, 1912, 75–76; "Spain and the Holy 'Office'," *The Freethinker*, February 11, 1912, 84–86; "Ecuador, Spain, and the Inquisition," *The Freethinker*, March 17, 1912, 164–165; and "The Medievalism of Modern Spain," *The Freethinker*, April 14, 1912, 234–235.
90 Hins, *La Libre Pensée internationale en 1911*, 5.

The Tensions between the National and the Universal: the 1907 Congress in Prague

The IFF's congress of 1907 illustrates the tensions between universal claims and notions of national distinctness in particularly striking fashion. Held in Prague, it took place in a period of heightened conflict between Czech and German nationalists. Before discussing the event itself, it is worth outlining its wider historical context. Pieter Judson has noted that the late Habsburg Monarchy was subject to manifold "battles over control of education."[91] Education was a contentious field in two respects: first, the question of secular education pitched Liberals and Catholics against one another. Second, towards the turn of the century, the role of language in schooling gave rise to further conflicts, especially in linguistically mixed areas. In 1897, the political sensitivities surrounding language were evidenced by the crisis over the Badeni Language Ordinances, a set of measures that sought to strengthen the role of Czech in the administration of Bohemia and Moravia. As Judson has argued, the conflict "galvanized German nationalist activists as had no other before it, motivating larger numbers of people to join existing nationalist and protective associations."[92]

Georg von Schönerer was a highly controversial protagonist in these conflicts. Having initially been elected to the *Reichsrat* as a liberal deputy, he subsequently promoted a radical nationalist agenda that fused Pan-Germanism and anti-Semitism.[93] He was not a freethinker, but he shared freethinkers' hostility to the Catholic Church: in his view, Catholicism seemed to advance the cause of the Czechs. As John Boyer put it, "Schönerer's strategy combined extreme nationalism and extreme anticlericalism in one unified, ideological format."[94] In 1890, Schönerer launched his *Los von Rom* (Away from Rome) campaign which has been described as "a twofold attack on Austrian Catholicism and on Viennese Christian Socialism," based on the notion that they "were part of a scheme to

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91 Pieter Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 283.

92 Pieter Judson, *Exclusive Revolutionaries: Liberal Politics, Social Experience, and National Identity in the Austrian Empire, 1848–1914* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 259. See also John Deak, *Forging a Multinational State: State Making in Imperial Austria from the Enlightenment to the First World War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 223–226.

93 On the process in which "racial nationalism" became increasingly prominent from the turn of the century, see Judson, *Exclusive Revolutionaries*, 258–266.

94 John Boyer, *Culture and Political Crisis in Vienna: Christian Socialism in Power, 1897–1918* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), 42–43.

despoil the purity of German culture and to undermine the resolve Austro-Germans needed to resist Czech political imperialism."[95] *Los von Rom* had limited success. The ambivalent response among German freethinkers is illustrated by *Das freie Wort*, a Frankfurt-based periodical with ties to freethought.[96] In covering Schönerer's campaign, one contributor acknowledged the positives of a rupture with Rome but suggested that the "enemies of Papism" needed "something better than an attachment to Protestantism."[97] In this instance, Schönerer's affinities with Prussian Lutheranism were an obstacle.

Another contributor to *Das freie Wort* was more receptive to Schönerer's ideas, however. Writing under the alias of "Peregrinus" (a term that described free subjects without citizenship in Roman law), he praised *Los von Rom* as "eminently patriotic in an Austrian sense."[98] His article formed part of a wider series on "the Austrian problem." Strong anti-Slavic sentiment pervaded these pieces, as reflected in references to a "racial struggle between Germans and Slavs" and the proclamation that "the Slavic danger has never been greater than today."[99] To Peregrinus, the "Young Czechs and the clergy" were "marching hand in hand."[100] Such statements seemingly ignored that large parts of the Czech national movement maintained their distance from the Catholic Church. While some Czech activists did seek to integrate Catholics into their conception of the Czech nation, such efforts proved controversial within the national movement.[101] As Jiří Malíř has argued, most members of the "Czech National Liberal camp," which the Young Czechs formed part of, "held a critical and detached stance towards the Catholic Church," while another section of the Czech movement, namely the National Social Party, embraced a "nationally motivated fierce anti-clericalism."[102] It has even been suggested that Bohemia's distinct religious

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95 Ibid., 42.

96 John Mackinnon Robertson, *A Short History of Freethought Ancient and Modern*, vol. 2 (London: Watts & Co, [3]1915), 411; Horst Groschopp, *Dissidenten: Freidenker und Kultur in Deutschland* (Marburg: Tectum, [2]2011), 338.

97 J. Brand, "Das Übel der 'Los-von-Rom'-Bewegung," *Das freie Wort* 1, no. 22 (1902): 681.

98 Peregrinus, "Los von Rom," *Das freie Wort* 1, no. 5 (1901): 134.

99 Peregrinus, "Das österreichische Problem," *Das freie Wort* 1, no. 2 (1901): 39.

100 Ibid., 41.

101 On these dynamics, see Martin Schulze Wessel, "Die Konfessionalisierung der tschechischen Nation," in *Nation und Religion in Europa: Mehrkonfessionelle Gesellschaften im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Dieter Langewiesche (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2004), 135–150.

102 Jiří Malíř, "The Anti-Clericalism of Social Democracy and the Secularization of the Working Class in the Czech Lands," in *Secularization and the Working Class: The Czech Lands and Central*

traditions could amount to "a Czech variant" of *Los von Rom*.[103] In other words, Peregrinus's comments were highly misleading. At the same time, they showed how anti-Catholic and anti-Slavic rhetoric could intersect. In line with such discourse, he described Agenor Maria Gołuchowski, the Polish count who served as the Habsburg Monarchy's foreign minister, as an "ancestry-proud aristocrat with the pain of a shipwrecked nation and the fervor of burning Catholicism in his heart."[104]

The IFF's Prague congress took place in a year that had already seen significant political mobilization. In May 1907, an electoral reform in the Cisleithanian half of the Habsburg Monarchy had resulted in the first elections based on universal male suffrage.[105] When freethinkers gathered in September, they affirmed the potential of their shared principles to override national differences and provide a forum for dialogue. The Czech freethought leader Theodor Bartošek opened the event by pointing out that "the two nationalities" had come together "in unity to accomplish an endeavor that had seemed impossible in light of the tense national circumstances of our country."[106] Indeed, Czech and German freethinkers from Bohemia had jointly organized the event. Having visited the congress as a delegate from Imperial Germany, Gustav Tschirn emphasized this aspect in his report for *Das freie Wort*. As he suggested, national groups that were otherwise "divided by hostility" had engaged in "fraternally enthusiastic cooperation for the shared cultural ideal of freedom of thought." Tschirn was hopeful about the positive legacy that the Prague gathering might have "for the nationality struggle in Austria."[107]

Some of the press coverage portrayed the event along similar lines. The *Prager Tagblatt* argued that the congress was particularly significant because "on this classic territory of nationality struggle, it has managed to attract Germans

Europe in the 19th Century, ed. Jiří Hanuš, Lukás Fasora and Jiří Malíř (Eugene/OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 99.

103 H. Gordon Skilling, "Masaryk: Religious Heretic," in *The Czech and Slovak Experience: Selected Papers from the Fourth World Congress for Soviet and East European Studies, Harrogate, 1990*, ed. John Morison (London: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 72; 62–88.

104 Peregrinus "Der polnische Kanzler," *Das freie Wort* 1, no. 14 (1901): 423.

105 In the wake of the elections, various Czech political groups put their joint efforts on a firmer organizational footing as they had lost electoral ground to the Social Democrats: Catherine Albrecht, "The Bohemian Question," in *The Last Years of Austria-Hungary: A Multi-National Experiment in Early Twentieth-Century Europe*, ed. Mark Cornwall (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2002), 85 and 88.

106 "Der Freidenker-Weltkongreß," *Prager Tagblatt*, September 9, 1907, 3.

107 Gustav Tschirn, "Der internationale Freidenker-Kongreß in Prag," *Das freie Wort* 7, no. 14 (1907): 537. With thanks to Katharina Neef for sharing this source.

and Czechs to [undertake] joint work."[108] The newspaper noted approvingly that the Czech academic František Krejčí had received "particularly great applause" for a speech in which he suggested that freethought might offer "a cleansing and overcoming of national antagonisms." Krejčí argued that "the motives of national strife cannot be justified on ethical grounds."[109] Symbolically, he switched from Czech to German midway through his speech.

Notwithstanding the sentiments expressed in such speeches, the congress was affected by the political tensions in Bohemia. The IFF's official report alluded to this aspect, referring to "the animosity which, in certain parts of Bohemia, exists between Czechs and Germans," singling out events in Prachatice/Prachatitz as "one of the battles where the racial animosity lit up."[110] As Pieter Judson has pointed out, Prachatice/Prachatitz was "largely a German-speaking administrative center" that "sat directly on the language frontier in a district whose rural majority spoke Czech."[111] Shortly before the congress, attempts by Czech nationalists to stage a festival in this town led to violent altercations.[112] Czech leaders highlighted these events by sending a telegram to the IFF gathering. In the congress hall, Ernst Viktor Zenker, a radical Viennese journalist, received "lively applause" when he asked the delegates to "protest against these barbarian mores." The congress subsequently passed a resolution that "condemned all nationalist agitation that departs from the peaceful path."[113] The motion portrayed such disputes as a division from the "successful struggle against reaction and clericalism," yet it also seemed to take sides as it denounced "in the strongest terms any attempt that aim at violating the right of a minority to demonstrate."[114]

Gustav Tschirn's report described the episode as "a test of solidarity of the most beautiful kind."[115] Yet whereas freethinkers managed to agree on a joint stance, various external observers expressed their disapproval. The *Prager Tagblatt* argued that the IFF resolution had been adopted "under the pressure of Czech politicians" and that, in the absence of "real information," it would

108 "Der Freidenker-Weltkongreß," *Prager Tagblatt*, September 9, 1907, 3.

109 Ibid.

110 Eugéne Hins, *Le Congrès de Prague (8 au 12 septembre 1907)* (Brussels: Bibliothèque de *La Pensée*, 1908), 17–18.

111 Pieter Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 89.

112 See e.g. "Große Demonstration in Prachatitz: Militär und Gendarmerie räumt den Marktplatz – Mehrere Deutsche verwundet," *Prager Tagblatt*, September 9, 1907, 1.

113 Hins, *Le Congrès de Prague*, 18.

114 "Der Freidenkerkongreß," *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, September 10, 1907, 4

115 Tschirn, "Der internationale Freidenker-Kongreß in Prag," 537.

have been better not to pass it. According to the newspaper, the freethinkers had violated their "proudly proclaimed principle," namely a "love for truth."[116] Such staunch criticism is noteworthy as it came from a periodical that covered freethought in largely favorable terms. Likewise, an article in Vienna's *Arbeiter-Zeitung* – the newspaper of the Austrian socialists – argued that the congress should have accepted that "the Prachatitz row is none of its business."[117] Seen from this angle, Zenker's support for the motion seemed unrepresentative of Austrian-German sentiment. At Prague, his speeches – delivered with "captivating passion, humor and satire" – attracted praise,[118] yet his popularity rarely extended beyond secularist circles. Notwithstanding his election to the Austrian Reichsrat in 1908, John Boyer has noted his relative isolation. In this context, he has stressed the distinctness of Zenker's stance on national matters: his "emphasis on culture as opposed to nation or class as the defining variable of progress made it easy for him to project transnational schemes of ethnic conciliation."[119]

In light of the political sensibilities surrounding the situation in Bohemia, even the traditional commemorative acts associated with IFF congresses proved contentious. As part of the congress program, delegates visited the city of Tábor, placing a crown on a monument to the Bohemian Hussite Jan Žižka. On the one hand, this act honored an individual who had confronted the ecclesiastical authorities. On the other hand, Žižka's role in the Hussite Wars made him a historical figure that could be appropriated for national purposes. The organizers admitted that the visit to Tábor had triggered "lively polemics" in Prague's German papers. In response, the IFF's Belgian secretary-general argued that the federation had not intended to engage in "nationalist propaganda." Instead, it had merely built on the custom of recent congresses, notably the visit to the Bruno monument in Rome in 1904 and commemorative acts for La Barre and Dolet in Paris in 1905.[120] The celebrations in Tábor did not reach the scales of these earlier events: it turned out to be a "rather modest and embarrassing" affair, with a somewhat "cold reception" for the visiting freethinkers.[121]

116 "Der Freidenker-Weltkongreß," *Prager Tagblatt*, September 10, 1907, 1

117 "Der Freidenkerkongreß," *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, September 10, 1907, 4. This statement was also noted in one of Prague's German-language newspapers: "Ein bemerkenswertes Urteil über die Prachatizer Resolution," *Prager Tagblatt*, September 11, 1907, 3.

118 Tschirn, "Der internationale Freidenker-Kongreß in Prag," 537.

119 Boyer, *Culture and Political Crisis*, 183.

120 Hins, *Le Congrès de Prague*, 26.

121 Stanislav Balík, Jiří Hanuš, Lukáš Fasora and Marek Vlha, *Der tschechische Antiklerikalismus: Quellen, Themen und Gestalt des tschechischen Antiklerikalismus in den Jahren 1848–1938* (Vienna: Lit, 2016), 231.

The Czech–German tensions in Bohemia were not the only national question that figured at the Prague congress: the German social democrat Ewald Vogtherr spoke out against the oppression of Poles, Danes and Alsatians in Imperial Germany, receiving much applause for his comment that people should "not be defined by their nationality or confession."[122] Vogtherr's comments formed part of a debate on "Patriotism and Freethought." They were based on a resolution that he had introduced together with the Swiss freethinker Otto Karmin. Their motion criticized "chauvinism," arguing that freethinkers should work towards a "federation of all nations, based on equal rights for everyone."[123] Such comments indicate the wider internationalist discourse within the IFF. However, not everyone went along with such notions. Indeed, in response to the resolution, the French delegate Delarue proclaimed himself a "patriot." In his view, not all nations were equal. He stressed that the French people would be "prepared to spill their blood for the freedom of other countries" and suggested that some nations were worthier to be defended than others. Elaborating on this theme, Delarue argued

> That the responsibility of every freethinker, in the case of a war that no measure could have prevented, is – by all means – not to give any support to the war effort by a people with a retrograde mentality against a people with more advanced mentality; but on the contrary, to participate in the defense of the most advanced nation on the path of liberty against the most retrograde nation.[124]

Such comments reveal ideas about a hierarchy of nations that, in some respects, sat uneasily alongside proclamations of universal values. Seen from another angle, however, they were but a manifestation of the ambivalent views that were present within the IFF. Even Karmin and Vogtherr's resolution was in some ways ambiguous: on the one hand, it stated that "Freethought, like science is international." On the other hand, it stressed that just as it "recognized everyone's right to an individual life," it would accord "the same right to the natural political and formations that are the nations."[125]

Despite these debates and divisions, freethinkers celebrated the Prague congress as a success. In his account for *The Freethinker*, William Heaford argued that the event had been "of incalculable advantage in stirring up the Czechs, the Poles, and their neighbors, the Austrian Germans, into united hostility

122 Hins, *Le Congrès de Prague*, 39.
123 Ibid., 38.
124 Ibid., 40.
125 Ibid., 38.

against the powers of darkness represented by religion."[126] He echoed the content of several congress speeches in claiming that Czechs and Germans were able to "forget their animosities under the beneficent aegis of Freethought."[127] Moreover, Heaford's comments illustrated how Czech freethinkers had been able to place their own activism within a wider historical narrative: "Evidently the spirit of Jan Huss [*sic*] is not dead in Bohemia, nor amongst the sons and daughters of that heroic race."[128] A few years later, Heaford returned to praising Bohemia as this "land, the sacred ground which has been soaked with the blood of martyrs innumerable, headed by the indomitable John Huss [*sic*] and Jerome of Prague, is the generous soil from which the seed of Freethought has recently sprung into a rich harvest of activity."[129]

Such comments are significant in several respects. They highlight that Czech activists had some success in casting their nation as a force for progress – built upon notions of a secular mission – rather than being dominated by reactionary interests. Such claims were more than rhetoric: freethinkers in Bohemia did enjoy links to influential political forces, for instance the Czech Realist Party and its co-founder Tomáš Masaryk.[130] Moreover, most Czech parties – with the obvious exception of the Catholic ones – had a wing that was positively inclined towards the freethought movement.[131] The convergence of secularist and national representations was embodied by the figure of Jan Hus. Freethinkers claimed the late medieval religious reformer as a martyr for their cause, yet he also played a central role in Czech visions of the national past.[132] This duality was not a contradiction: in freethought discourse, Hus could be a national contribu-

126 William Heaford, "Freethought in Many Lands: International Freethought," *The Freethinker*, July 26, 1908, 474.

127 Heaford, "Freethought in Many Lands: Bohemia," 362.

128 Ibid.

129 William Heaford, "Bohemia for Freethought," *The Freethinker*, January 7, 1912, 4.

130 Johannes Gleixner, *"Menschheitsreligionen": T.G. Masaryk, A.V. Lunačarskij und die religiöse Herausforderung revolutionärer Staaten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 71–77.

131 With thanks to Johannes Gleixner for clarifying and contextualizing this aspect, as well as also commenting on other parts of this chapter.

132 On the imagery of Jan Hus in Czech nationalism: Cynthia Paces, "Religious Heroes for a Secular State: Commemorating Jan Hus and Saint Wenceslas in 1920s Czechoslovakia," in *Staging the Past: Commemorations in the Habsburg Lands*, ed. Nancy Wingfield and Marie Bucur (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2001), 199–225; Cynthia Paces and Nancy Wingfield, "The Sacred and the Profane: Religion and Nationalism in the Bohemian Lands, 1880–1920," in *Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe*, ed. Pieter Judson and Marsha Rozenblit (New York/Oxford: Berghahn, 2005), 107–125; Schulze Wessel, "Die Konfessionalisierung der tschechischen Nation."

tion to an international pantheon. Unsurprisingly, Czech freethinkers planned an international congress to mark the 500th anniversary of Hus's death. While the outbreak of the First World War meant that this congress never happened, its initial announcement highlighted the national connotations of this planned international event:

> We would like this to become a new stage on the path towards the rebirth of our national character. We want the Czech nation to put an end to the spirit of Rome which would effectively be the best celebration of the martyr of [the Council of] Constance. We want that the year 1915 be the triumph of the Czech spirit over the spirit of Rome.[133]

Conclusion

By the early twentieth century, freethinkers drew on a well-established repertoire that allowed them to assert the universality of their cause. Alongside speeches and pamphlets, they deployed processions, marches, music and a host of commemorative activities. In doing so, they suggested that their shared goals overrode national differences. Moreover, through the celebration of particular martyr figures, they alleged that the IFF's work formed part of a struggle that had been waged for a long time.

The position and nature of freethinkers evidently varied between different countries. In some respects, this could in itself be of use to the international movement. For instance, by showcasing a nation's contribution to the wider cause, freethinkers could offer inspiration and renewed vigor to their peers in other countries. With regard to the Belgian case, Jeffrey Tyssens and Petri Mirala have noted the relevance of such transnational influences: "Looking optimistically at developments in France, Latin America and especially Portugal, Belgian freethinkers saw their aspiration to *laïcité* as a part of a broad progressive movement of history toward a secular utopia."[134] In this respect, references to national distinctness were not necessarily a matter of nationalism, but of identifying cases that might reinforce convictions about the onward march of freethought. The flipside of the coin, however, was that countries could also be cast as lagging behind on the road of progress. The negative portrayals of Spain, which the Ferrer affair reinforced, were a striking example of this dimension.

Freethinkers were hardly oblivious to notions of national difference. The freethought congress in Prague illustrated this point. Whereas to German nation-

133 La Libre Pensée Prague, *Les Tchèques et la libre pensée* (Prague: A. Reis, 1910), 15.
134 Tyssens and Mirala, "Transnational Seculars," 1369.

alists, Slavic nationalism seemed allied to clericalism, Czech freethinkers posited a different vision in which the Hussite legacy allowed them to cast their nation as particularly progressive. But alongside such national discourse, the IFF congresses continued to proclaim the conviction that freethought would transcend national antagonisms. As subsequent wartime ruptures demonstrated, this view was overly optimistic – but the pervasiveness of this discourse suggests that universalist notions were central to freethinkers' understanding of secularity.

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Johannes Gleixner

Socialist Secularism between Nation, State, and the Transnational Movement: The International of Proletarian Freethinkers in Central and Eastern Europe

In December 1928, the well-established Czechoslovak branch of the international freethought movement, the *Volná Myšlenka* (Free Thought, VM), reflected on the question of "unity in the movement of unbelievers." Looking back on 1926, these freethinkers remembered having been pressured by so called "proletarian" freethinkers to dissolve the differing national and political organizations in order to found a united socialist freethought movement. Quite gleefully, the VM noticed the lacking success of this enterprise. Czech and German socialist freethinkers in Czechoslovakia did not only fail to unify behind the banner of proletarian freethinking. What is more, also their international organization, the International of Proletarian Freethought (IPF), was torn apart by factional struggles:

> […] this International, which is mostly communist and does not have any other members than Russians, Germans from Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Germany, the Communist League [of Unbelievers, J. G.] from Czechoslovakia, as well as several miniature and in their respective countries completely meaningless organizations of other nationalities […].[1]

At first glance, this harsh judgement seems to be justified: in the short time of its nominal existence (1925 – 1936), the IPF, in fact, was only functional for three years, that is, until 1928. Its rapid disintegration mirrored, albeit with some delay, the labor movement's split into communists and social democrats. The IPF also never was international in the broad sense of the term but rather a peculiar East and Central European organization that recruited its members almost exclusively from Soviet Russia, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Germany, and Poland.[2] In its mocking report, the VM also mentioned the nationality of the German and Russian member organizations while conveniently omitting that the Communist League of Czechoslovakia, notwithstanding its transnational orientation, was, in

1 R. K., "O jednotu v bezvěreckém hnutí," *Volná Myšlenka*, December 7, 1928, 49. If not indicated otherwise, all translations are the author's.

2 Amongst others, some token member organizations existed in France, Belgium, Norway, and the United States, though they never represented more than fringe movements in their respective countries.

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fact, overwhelmingly Czech in its actual setup. This points to the problem of international organizations as battlegrounds for national(ist) struggles that also stirred up the IPF – an organization at the crossroads between ideological, national, and socio-cultural differences.

Still, the IPF was an ambitious attempt not only in terms of overcoming these fault lines but also in creating an international platform for socialists, who mostly were not at the center of their respective parties but, nonetheless, tried to shape socialism as a cultural force. Analyzing the IPF's structures and initiatives, it becomes evident how freethinkers from different countries dealt with the question of church and religion in public life and to what degree they influenced each other. Thus, and despite all its faults, the sheer existence of the IPF could be considered a success story, as this organization proved – and to a certain degree also ensured – the plurality of the socialist discourse beyond party discipline well into the late 1920s. Besides, and other than their more nationalist (or more loyalist) liberal counterparts, its member organizations often took on a decidedly internationalist outlook.[3] From an international and transnational perspective, this illustrates both ideological and national conflicts and the ways in which socialists of all shades perceived each other beyond the factional struggles of national political arenas. The IPF also served as a challenger to established liberal secularist narratives by forcefully claiming for religion never to be a sheer private matter, but to be political in its essence and therefore an integral part of the political discourse. The "proletarian secularity" it propagated could neither be an individual nor private matter, but claimed to be a comprehensive political doctrine. Thus, for the socialist freethinkers, fighting religion and creating a new secular and socialist culture seemed linked on a basic level. Therefore, the ultimate fate of proletarian secularity was bound to its political success as a movement. This explains the most striking feature of Proletarian Freethought, namely that its intense focus on organizational matters has to be understood as part of its ideological framework.[4] In short, the IPF tells us as

3 In this chapter, I will mostly rely on the more general expression of "socialist freethought/freethinker," when addressing the movement. I am aware that this is not a very precise term, but it does not evoke the same difficulties concerning translation as "proletarian freethought," "unbelievers," or "godless." Also, neither Czech nor Russian nor German sources are in any way consistent in their use of such terms or in their translations from other languages. Only after 1930 the terms "godless" and "unbeliever" were used to characterize decidedly militant communist organizations.

4 This idea of organization as ideology is a key argument in Daniel Peris' account of organized atheism in the early Soviet Union. See Daniel Peris, *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 138 – 141. In my chapter, I would like

much about the specific interwar "culture wars,"[5] as it reveals about the dynamics of European socialisms.

In this chapter, I will focus mostly on German and Czech socialist freethought in Czechoslovakia and the Soviet godless movement in their national and transnational interplay within the IPF,[6] including some additional remarks on German proletarian freethought.[7] I will mostly consider the years from 1920 to 1928. They cover the various attempts to set up an international organization of socialist freethought as well as the foundation and the establishment of the IPF up until its de facto split into competing factions. After all, the chapter offers an overview and case study of socialism, revolutionary secularism, and freethinking in a tense and eventful national and international framing.

Socialism and Freethinking after the First World War

Freethinking has always taken on international colorings. As recent scholarship has stressed, especially during the nineteenth century, Europe's freethinkers did

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to expand on this, casting it not as a specific feature of Soviet godlessness, but a general problem of socialist freethought as a political movement.

5 See Todd Weir, "Introduction: Comparing Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Culture Wars," *Journal of Contemporary History* 53, no. 3 (2018): 497–498.

6 Todd Weir has already pointed to the entanglement of transnational and national struggles in the interwar culture wars in Germany: Todd Weir, "European Culture War in the Twentieth Century? Anti-Catholicism and Anti-Bolshevism between Moscow, Berlin, and the Vatican 1922 to 1933," *Journal of Religious History* 39, no. 2 (2015): 298–304.

7 To my knowledge, no systematic research on Austrian freethought has yet been conducted. For the sake of my argument, I will focus mostly on German-speaking socialist freethinkers in Czechoslovakia. Besides the designation of their organization, *Freidenkerbund*, these freethinkers share some more similarities with the Austrians, even after 1918. For German socialist freethought, I will rely mostly on Jochen-Christoph Kaiser's seminal work: Jochen-Christoph Kaiser, *Arbeiterbewegung und organisierte Religionskritik: Proletarische Freidenkerverbände in Kaiserreich und Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981). On the Soviet godless movement, there is a solid body of research; its international connections, however, have been mostly neglected so far. To complete the picture, one would also have to consider the Polish member organization. Polish freethought was likewise marked by splits and mergers of different ideological and regional groups. Simultaneously, it often was the target of state repressions which made it almost impossible for Polish freethinkers to engage substantially in transnational terms. I will also not refer to the member organizations of the United States, Belgium, and France because they were too small to have any significant impact. Without exception, they voted together with the Soviet and Czech (communist) delegates.

indeed constitute a transnational movement, often referring to and campaigning for commonly shared topics.[8] Lasting efforts to organize transnationally were not made before the late nineteenth century, though. The foundation of the *Fédération Internationale de la Libre Pensée* (International Freethought Federation, IFF) in Brussels in 1880 was rather the result of several decades of European freethinking activity than its starting point. In Central Europe, national affiliates of the IFF developed even later, mostly during the first decade after the turn of the century.

Once they had gained influence, the national freethought movements started to diversify. In the presence of influential socialist mass movements they were challenged to work out their stance toward politics. While freethinkers always displayed an affinity to socialist ideas, this relationship was quite ambiguous, as Daniel Laqua has already pointed out with regard to Western Europe.[9] This counts even more true for Central and Eastern Europe with the German, Austrian, and Russian social democratic parties employing a more rigid Marxist political doctrine. Not surprisingly, from the turn of the century on, freethinkers in Imperial Germany and the Habsburg Empire started to experience conflicts with social democracy. Already back then, one main fault line between freethinkers and social democrats was the question on whether the fight against religion could be subsumed under the doctrine of class struggle or whether it should follow its own logic. German social democracy remained markedly indifferent to freethinkers despite attempts to come to terms with their movement; the leadership of the Czech Social Democratic Party, however, openly attacked the freethinkers in 1908, denying them the right to be a part of the labor movement.[10] Even though they acknowledged the role of religious dissenters in general, Rus-

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8 See on the German, French, and Spanish cases and for a discussion of the transnationality of anticlericalism: Lisa Dittrich, *Antiklerikalismus in Europa: Öffentlichkeit und Säkularisierung in Frankreich, Spanien und Deutschland (1848–1914)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014). See also Daniel Laqua, *The Age of Internationalism and Belgium 1880–1930: Peace, Progress and Prestige* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

9 See Daniel Laqua, "'Laïque, démocratique et sociale'? Socialism and the Freethinkers' International," *Labour History Review* 74, no. 3 (2009): 259–262.

10 On Germany, see Sebastian Prüfer, *Sozialismus statt Religion: Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie vor der religiösen Frage, 1863–1890* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002); on the Czech case prior to the war, see Jiří Malíř, "The Anti-Clericalism of Social Democracy and the Secularization of the Working Class in the Czech Lands," in *Secularization and the Working Class: The Czech Lands and Central Europe in the 19th Century*, ed. Lukáš Fasora, Jiří Hanuš and Jiří Malíř (La Vergne: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 83–115.

sian social democrats similarly refused to dilute their Marxist doctrine.[11] No other than their German and Czech comrades, the Russian Marxists considered the freethought movement to be a related, but nonetheless liberal bourgeois project.[12] The Russian example constituted a special case also insofar as organized freethinking simply did not exist and a critique of religion remained mostly confined to intellectual philosophical circles without mass appeal.[13] But already the Revolution of 1905 had indicated that questions of democracy, socialism, and revolution could be tied to religion easily.[14]

It was only in the last decade before the First World War that a distinctly socialist freethought movement started to develop and – while being in general friendly to the Brussels based IFF – sought to differentiate from its "bourgeois" comrades in order to answer the needs of the non-believing working class. Still, socialist freethought did not become a mass phenomenon before the war. While in 1908 the more left wing German freethinkers successfully established a "proletarian" organization (*Zentralverband deutscher Freidenkervereine*, German Freethinkers' League), and the Czechs, quite similarly, founded the *Svaz socialistických monistů* (League of Socialist Monists), none of these associations gained significant influence on the party leadership before the war, and they also did not manage to attract a larger number of members.[15]

One could argue that already before the war the socio-cultural setup of freethinking in Central and Eastern Europe started to diverge from its Western counterparts. Differences between bourgeois anticlericalism and organizations of

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11 See in general Lenin's well known essay on "Socialism and Religion" (*Социализм и религия, Socializm i religija*, 1905), whose main goal was to draw a distinction between Marxist revolutionaries and the liberal (and religious) opposition to Czarist rule. Curiously enough, this document became a rather unintended blueprint for later Soviet anti-religious policy. See Vladimir I. Lenin, "Socialism and Religion," in *V. I. Lenin: Collected Works,* vol. 10: *November 1905 – June 1906*, ed. Andrew Rothstein (Moscow: Progress Publishers, ^{3}1972), 83 – 87.

12 For details, see Johannes Gleixner, *"Menschheitsreligionen": T. G. Masaryk, A. V. Lunačarskij und die religiöse Herausforderung revolutionärer Staaten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 127 – 129.

13 Considering the absence of institutionalized freethought, it is generally difficult to distinguish a tradition of freethought from liberal religious activism before 1917. See Gregory L. Freeze, "A Case of Stunted Anticlericalism: Clergy and Society in Imperial Russia," *European History Quarterly* 13 (1983): 191 – 193.

14 Martin Schulze Wessel, *Revolution und religiöser Dissens: Der römisch-katholische und der russisch-orthodoxe Klerus als Träger religiösen Wandels in den böhmischen Ländern und in Russland 1848 – 1922* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2011), 73 – 79.

15 See Jochen-Christoph Kaiser, "Organisierte Religionskritik im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 37 (1985): 206 – 208; and Malíř, "The Anti-Clericalism of Social Democracy," 98.

working class culture already existed at the beginning of the twentieth century. But the breakthrough of secular(izing) mass organizations in this particular region happened only after the fundamental shift in the political and legal framework that was initiated in the revolutionary aftermath of the First World War.[16] The new revolutionary and democratic governments of the successor states of the German, Habsburg, and Russian Empires re-evaluated the former influential role of the churches that had been shaken up by the events.[17] The shifting discursive framework of the postwar years suggests that, with the monarchies gone, the masses were finally free to entirely adopt a better way of life. This narrative was not limited to socialist circles, but gained cross-party support, not least also among nationalists and elites in several of the new states. They were hoping for the urban and rural population to take on new collective identities more in line with intellectual visions of society and in support of the new political order. In most cases, this particular identity was bound to a religious confession. In the Czech case, virtually all political elites expected the population to abandon Catholicism; the same counts true for other newly established or transformed states. Up until 1921, an unprecedented high number of people left the churches, especially in industrial areas.[18] Both church apologetics and

16 There seems no contradiction between the long term trend of declining religious practice and the relatively quick development of socialist atheist organizations immediately after the war. This is because other than bourgeois secularization, non-religion among workers was in general a phenomenon of the early twentieth century and the aftermath of the First World War. For a study of the German case, see Benjamin Ziemann, "Zur Entwicklung christlicher Religiosität in Deutschland und Westeuropa, 1900 – 1960," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 65 (2013): 102 – 109.

17 See for an explanation of this argument with regard to Austria-Hungary and the Russian Empire Martin Schulze Wessel, "Religion, Politics and the Limits of Imperial Integration: Comparing the Habsburg Monarchy and the Russian Empire," in *Comparing Empires: Encounters and Transfers in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Jörn Leonhard and Ulrike von Hirschhausen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 337 – 358. A comparison to the situation in interwar-Germany, to my knowledge, still awaits attention. See, however, Todd Weir, "The Secular Beyond: Free Religious Dissent and Debates over the Afterlife in Nineteenth-Century Germany," *Church History* 77, no. 3 (2008): 633.

18 Ziemann, "Zur Entwicklung," 109 – 110; Zdeněk R. Nešpor, "Der Wandel der tschechischen (Nicht-)Religiosität im 20. Jahrhundert im Lichte soziologischer Forschungen," *Historisches Jahrbuch* 129 (2009): 508 – 510. As already mentioned, the Russian case is harder to access. Soviet surveys from a later period, however, indicate a similar phenomenon in Russian industrial areas. See Johannes Gleixner, "Beginnings of Soviet Sociology of Religion and the A(Religion) of Muscovite Workers (1925 – 1932)," in *Transfers of Knowledge about Religion and Atheism in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Dirk Schuster and Jenny Vorpahl (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2020) (forthcoming).

atheists interpreted this wave of exits as a sign of the times: areligious indifference finally was over and the people seemed to wake up to their spiritual needs. Many freethinkers and socialists spotted the opportunity to recruit followers for their scientific and progressive worldviews, a step they believed would be no less than a political necessity. Against this backdrop it is not by chance that the histories of socialist freethought and the IPF are mostly tied to the interwar history of Central and Eastern Europe.

For left-wing freethinkers, this development was a call for restructuring and unifying the movement. What seemed even more urgent was the search for a new and comprehensive socialist culture build around promoting church exit. The old social democratic paradigm of religion being a private matter had lost any traction and, by 1918, even seemed an obstacle on the way to a broad socialist education and politics.[19] But the socialist parties, social democrats, and the new communist movement alike, continued to ignore these tendencies, making the need for independent organizations even more imperative.[20]

Toward Socialist Freethought as an International Movement

Despite some broad convergences, the socialist freethinkers in each of the mentioned countries started under different conditions and, in the beginning, developed along different paths. In these regards, among the most significant ideological challenges for freethinkers was the formation of a revolutionary socialist state in Russia that proclaimed to be atheist and internationalist. One of the first decrees the Bolshevik government issued in January 1918 ordered the separation of church and state and the secularization of the educational system. These steps did not signal a cultural revolution, though, but rather completed nineteenth-century Russian bourgeois anticlericalism that relied on the example of French *laïcité*.[21] The Russian case strongly echoed in both revolutionary Ger-

19 The freethinkers reinvigorated an old debate within social democracy that never had been resolved. See Prüfer, *Sozialismus statt Religion*, 192–199; 271–273. One of the main proponents of proletarian international freethought, Theodor Hartwig, published extensively on this question. For a synthesis of some of his articles, see Theodor Hartwig, *Sozialismus und Freidenkertum* (Bodenbach: Verlag des Bundes proletarischer Freidenker, 1924).

20 See Kaiser, *Arbeiterbewegung und Religionskritik*, 140–141.

21 Otto Luchterhand, *Die Religionsgesetzgebung der Sowjetunion* (Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 1978), 9–20.

many and Czechoslovakia which announced almost identical goals. But other than in Germany and Czechoslovakia, Soviet Russia actually implemented the strict separation of church and state, accompanied by widespread violence and lawlessness during the civil war. The Soviet government initially interpreted religious changes as a mere rise of religious indifference, assuming people would stop believing once they discovered the religious "fraud." This is why no comprehensive doctrine of atheism was developed in any way up until 1929. Although a number of activists expressed freethinking ideas and published on the topic, they were only loosely linked to the Communist Party.[22] Other early attempts to form a secularist worldview were put under the umbrella term of "proletarian culture" prominently institutionalized in the *Пролеткульт* (*proletkul't,* Proletarian Culture) during the civil war. This organization, in fact, tried to reach out internationally but was soon dissolved.[23] International contacts fell under the domain of the newly founded Communist International, the *Komintern.* In 1922, on its fourth congress, a declaration was passed stating that proletarian culture and lifestyle could only form as part of the class struggle. Proletarian freethinking – identified with various proletarian culture organizations – was not referenced in particular.[24] Specific "anti-religious" organizations did not even exist in Soviet Russia until 1922, which added to the absence of Soviet freethinking activists from the international area for longer periods.

In Germany, proletarian freethought organizations already existed before the war, albeit with regional strongholds, mainly in Berlin, the Rhineland, and Saxony. Communism prospered in these regions; the socialist freethinkers, however, were equally present in both of the large German socialist parties, SPD and KPD. But most of the German freethinkers were without formal party affiliation: in 1929, still only around 20 % of proletarian freethinkers in Berlin were organized in those two parties. This suggests the tendency to hold non-affiliated memberships, whereas in the early aftermath of the First World War socialist freethinkers

22 For more detailed information on the early Soviet anti-religious discourse, see Gleixner, *Menschheitsreligionen*, 151–159.

23 In Soviet Russia, the institutionalization of *proletkul't* reached its peak in the years 1921–1922 when it was placed under the control of the Communist Party. Shortly afterwards, it ceased working as an independent organization and was dissolved thereafter. See Lynn Mally, *Culture of the Future: The Proletkult Movement in Revolutionary Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 200–201.

24 John Riddell, ed., *Toward the United Front: Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, 1922* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012), 879.

displayed a close proximity to the short-lived Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD).[25]

When the (bourgeois) IFF resumed its activities after the war, the German and Austrian national organizations initially were banned because the influential Belgian branch accused them of having supported the German war atrocities against Belgian civilians. During the first postwar international congress held in Prague in 1920, the IFF put forward conditions for their readmission, given that they would condemn the German-Austrian aggression.[26] Though perfectly willing to denounce war and nationalist aggression in general, German and Austrian freethought organizations refused to be stigmatized as perpetrators.[27] It is striking that the German freethinkers from Bohemia – reorganized as *Freidenkerbund für die Tschechoslowakische Republik* (Freethinker League of Czechoslovakia) in December 1919 – were not expelled but instead invited to join the Prague congress. Together with the German-speaking freethinkers from Switzerland they assumed the speaker role for German freethinkers, emphatically supporting an unconditional readmission of the banned member organizations.[28] Their success, though, was limited: it was only in 1922 that several German freethought organizations accepted the conditions and rejoined the IFF. The openly socialist organizations were not among them.[29]

This temporary expulsion and the rapid growth of socialist freethought organizations already set the scene for an alternative attempt by German-speaking freethinkers to organize internationally.[30] To them, the IFF seemed toothless anyway – it was called a "Papier-Internationale" ("international on paper"). Instead, German-speaking freethinkers started to find a "lebensfähige" ("viable") international organization they believed would be able to cope with the challenges of the new era.[31]

Attempting to address all these issues at once, the *Zentralverband proletarischer Freidenker in Deutschland* (Central Association of Proletarian Freethinkers in Germany, ZpFD) called for an International Conference in Leipzig in 1922. This

25 Kaiser, *Arbeiterbewegung und Religionskritik*, 126–128.

26 Jeffrey Tyssens and Petri Mirala, "Transnational Seculars: Belgium as an International Forum for Freethinkers and Freemasons in the Belle Époque," *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 90, no. 4 (2012): 1367. On the influential role of Belgian freethought in general, see Laqua, "Socialism and Freethinker," 264–265.

27 "Aus unserer Internationale," *Freier Gedanke* 2, no. 7 (1921): 5.

28 *Freier Gedanke* 1, no. 3 (1920): 6–7.

29 Tyssens and Mirala, "Transnational Seculars," 1367.

30 Ibid.

31 Theodor Kilian, "Freidenker-Internationale und ihr Organ," *Freier Gedanke* 3, no. 13 (1922): 4–5.

meeting should consolidate the German freethinker-scene, define its supposedly "proletarian" outlook and discuss the matter of an alternative international organization.[32] As a precondition for participation, no cooperating association was allowed to deny the important role and reality of class struggle for freethinking.[33] After two follow-up meetings in Kassel and Magdeburg in the same year, several factions of socialist freethought in Germany merged and formed the *Gemeinschaft proletarischer Freidenker* (Society of Proletarian Freethought, GpF). With more than 100,000 members, it became the largest political organization of socialist freethought.[34] Besides the GpF, the even more frequented funeral insurance funds continued to exist with the single largest organization of non-believing workers in Germany, the *Verein der Freidenker für Feuerbestattung* (Association of Freethinkers for Cremation, VfF) based in Berlin.[35] While the VfF, for the time being, acted rather unpolitical, the call for organizational renewal was met also by several bourgeois organizations. They also combined their efforts and cooperated with the GpF. The goals of greater international recognition, national consolidation, and of a strengthened socialism seemed to overlap and complement each other. The IFA's manifesto also foresaw – much to the chagrin of the socialists – that freethought organizations from abroad could intervene to prevent a clear commitment to socialism and class struggle by consulting with the existing federation before signing off on a completely new organization.[36] Ironically, this position was supported by the only, to some extend communist delegate, an unnamed representative of the Soviet Russian *proletkul't*. He likewise refused to join the IFA and suggested instead to establish an International of culture organizations. This was in line with the direction taken by the *Komintern*.

The new Czechoslovak Republic, by contrast, was set up as a progressive polity, striving to introduce a democratic *laïcité*. One of the founding documents of Czechoslovakia, the Pittsburgh Declaration of May 1918, had propagated the separation of church and state as a precondition for state-building early, while

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32 *Freier Gedanke* 3, no. 10 (1922): 5–7.
33 A. Müller, "Die Freidenker-Internationale auf dem Wege," *Freier Gedanke* 3, no. 21 (1922): 1.
34 Jochen-Christoph Kaiser casts some doubt on these numbers and suggests a membership half the size. (Kaiser, *Arbeiterbewegung und Religionskritik*, 146.)
35 While the GpF was the largest association of its kind, several other socialist freethought organizations continued to exist, especially in the Western German Rhineland. Based mostly in the industrial cities of Thuringia and Saxony, the GpF showed also certain regional features. For a short overview, see ibid., 146–147; 350–351.
36 Müller, "Freidenker-Internationale," 2; 5. See also Kaiser, *Arbeiterbewegung und Religionskritik*, 187–188.

the war was still going on. Czech freethinking was an important element of the dominant anti-Catholic Czech culture originating in prewar times, therefore deeply entangled with the political mainstream and closer to actual political power. When, in 1919, German freethought socialists lamented the betrayal of the revolution by a government that included the Catholic Center Party,[37] Czech anticlerical freethinkers still were hopeful activists, discussing how to separate church and state.[38] The VM, together with several of the growing socialist groups of "unbelievers," thus, experienced the year 1918 as a historical breakthrough. The discussions of this pivotal moment among freethinkers lasted for several years.[39] One of the leading freethinking voices was probably Theodor Bartošek, a high ranking member of both the VM and the Czechoslovak Socialist Party, who worked out a detailed separation law, which he submitted in May 1920.[40] In the end it was not implemented, but the *Freidenkerbund* (Freethinker League) of Czechoslovakia discussed Bartošek's ideas broadly, suggesting some corrections, but otherwise expressing its support.[41]

Despite strong anti-Catholic leanings in Czech political culture, a political majority for the idea of separating church and state was hard to gain. As the relationship between the Catholic Church and the state remained an open question, a sort of culture war between social democrats, socialists, freethinkers, and secular nationalists on the one hand, and the Catholic Church on the other erupted.[42] For the duration of this struggle to implement a secular state on a constitutional level, socialist and bourgeois freethinkers found themselves fighting the same fight. But just as in Germany, socialist freethought was on the rise also in Czechoslovakia. A multitude of local "unbeliever"-groups sprang up, mostly in Prague, the industrialized areas of Northern and Eastern Bohemia, and in larger cities like Ostrava and Brno. Their members entertained vague ideas about socialism, class struggle, and atheist culture.

Not least due to the unique situation of the socialist parties in Czechoslovakia it proved quite difficult to establish a common framework: while the com-

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37 Ibid., 140

38 Schulze Wessel, *Revolution und Dissens*, 137–139.

39 For an overview of the contemporary literature on the topic, see Michal Pehr and Jaroslav Šebek, *Československo a Svatý stolec: Od nepřátelství ke spolupraci (1918–1928): I. Úvodní studie*, with the assistance of Pavel Helan and Marek Šmíd (Prague: Masarykův ústav AV ČR, 2012), 50.

40 Theodor Bartošek, *Odluka církve od státu a její důsledky* (Prague: Svaz Národního Osvobození, 1924).

41 Ludwig Wahrmund, the first president of the *Freidenkerbund*, was a respected scholar of church law. In the autumn of 1920, he wrote a series of articles on Bartošek's legislative proposal. See *Freier Gedanke* 1, no. 4–9 (1920).

42 Pehr and Šebek, *Československo a Svatý*, 13–23.

munists split up with social democracy quite late, at the end of 1920,[43] there was a "national-social" party originating in the late nineteenth century, which had moved to the left, embraced socialism and, to a certain degree, furthered the idea of class struggle without Marxism, called the Czechoslovak Socialist Party.[44] These Czechoslovak socialists, although quite nationalistic, also included a number of known anarchists and pacifists, often with strong anticlerical attitudes, such as Bohuslav Vrbenský, Luisa Landová-Štychová, or the already mentioned Theodor Bartošek.

The two most important factions of socialist freethought were the *Sdružení sociálnědemokratických bezvěrců* (Association of Social Democratic Unbelievers) and the *Svaz socialistických bezvěrců* (League of Socialist Unbelievers). The first rooted in the social democratic tradition of the socialist monists of 1913 and, after 1920, decided to side with the Communist Party, renaming itself *Federace komunistických osvětových jednot* (Federation of Enlightened Communist Cells, FKOJ), and chose the label "communist" slightly before the foundation of the actual party.[45] The second faction was established as a decidedly non-party organization but had a clear personal overlap with the Czechoslovak socialists. Both groups were structured rather loosely, as the designation FKOJ already suggested. The Socialist Unbelievers, for their part, consisted of two homonymic organizaions located in Prague and in Northern Bohemia in the industrial town of Most.[46] Besides, many socialist freethinkers such as Bartošek remained members of the traditional *Volná Myšlenka*. Together with the *Deutsche Freidenkerbund* (German Freethinker League), only the latter was active on international grounds. As organizer of the 1920 congress in Prague, the VM remained an important member of the IFF in Brussels.

In the autumn of 1920, Czech freethinkers saw the opportunities for a secular state passing by: firstly, growing tensions in the ranks of the social democrats weakened the party's influence. Furthermore, it became clear that Bartošek's proposal would not turn into law in the foreseeable future. In light of these de-

43 Nancy M. Wingfield, "Working-Class Politics in the Bohemian Lands 1918 – 1921: National Identity, Class Consciousness, and the Social Democratic Parties," *Bohemia* 34 (1993): 90 – 105.
44 While this "national socialist" party later developed a fascist wing, it should not be confused with German National Socialism. For that reason, I will address this group as "Czechoslovak Socialists," although they used different labels. Research on this party is still scarse. Some clarification offers Detlef Brandes, "Die tschechoslowakischen National-Sozialisten," in *Die erste tschechoslowakische Republik als multinationaler Parteienstaat*, ed. Karl Bosl (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1979), 101 – 154.
45 "K našemu názvu," *Jiskry* 2, no. 15 (1921): 144.
46 Milan Matoušek, "K organisační otázce našeho hnutí," *Socialistický bezvěrec* 1, no. 14 (1922): 108.

velopments, the VM and the two socialist organizations joined forces and founded an *Akční výbor pro rozluku církve od státu* (Action Committee for the Separation of the Church from the State).[47] Due to their quite friendly relations dating back to prewar times, the *Freidenkerbund* and the VM formed common action committees as well.[48] One curious common feature of this broad anti-Catholic coalition was its devotion to the Czech reformer Jan Hus, taken as a secular symbol not only of Czech nationality but also of progressiveness more in general. In this veneration, the German freethinkers of Czechoslovakia, with their loyalist attitude, differed from freethinkers in Germany and Austria.[49] This broad alliance did not last, however, not least because of its lacking success and a beginning feeling of resignation. It came as a major shock to freethinkers in Czechoslovakia, when the Catholic *Československá strana lidová* (Czechoslovak People's Party) joined the government in 1921, having made itself indispensable for the government.[50]

The FKOJ and the Socialist Unbelievers started to cooperate closely in the same year. They shared an antipathy for mainstream social democracy and its dovish policy with regard to the relationship between state and church.[51] Also, both were suspicious toward the VM, especially because of its neutral stance regarding other, non-Catholic, denominations and due to its refusal to accept socialism as the only possible basis of freethinking.[52] The German *Freidenkerbund*

47 This organization called for the separation of church and state and claimed the confiscation of church property. See the title page of *Jiskry: Organ Sdružení Soc. Dem. Bezvěrců* 1 (1920): 1.
48 Rudolf Lebenhart, the general secretary of the *Freidenkerbund*, even singled out the representative of the *Volná Myšlenka*, František Krejčí, as the only comrade supporting him at the 1920 Prague Congress, when pleading the German cause. As Daniel Laqua's chapter in this volume shows, Krejčí was a consistent advocate of internationalism in this account. See Lebenhart's report from the retrospective: Rudolf Lebenhart, "Zum ersten internationalen Freidenkerkongreß," *Freier Gedanke* 5, no. 19 (1924): 1.
49 R. L. [= Rudolf Lebenhart], "Johann Hus," *Freier Gedanke* 6, no. 13 (1925): 1.
50 After 1921, due to parliamentary majorities, almost any coalition government of parties loyal to the republic had to rely on the Czech Catholics. Although despised by freethinkers and especially by the anticlerical Czechoslovak socialists, the people's party was actually very loyal to the republic, even alienating the Holy See at times. See Pehr and Šebek, *Československo a Svatý*, 21–23.
51 Even though there were also social democratic freethinkers, their influence was limited to the local level. The situation in Ostrava marked an important exception. See Martin Jemelka, "The Social Democratic Atheist Movement in Interwar Ostrava," in Fasora, Hanuš and Malíř, eds, *Secularization and the Working Class*, 174–192.
52 Such conflicts arose on a local level as well, leading young radical activists to abandon traditional freethought. See Vojtěch Malínek, "Kapitán generace? Zdeněk Kalista a nejmladší česká

of Czechoslovakia took an interesting stance between those forming camps. Other than its Czech counterparts, it remained a unified organization that incorporated liberal freethinkers, social democrats, and even communists. This might have been because the split between social democrats and communists, without even taking into account the Czechoslovak socialists, had affected the German labor movement to a much lesser degree. Also, the *Freidenkerbund* most probably acted as a common interest group for secular Germans in the Czechoslovak Republic, who found themselves marginalized.[53] This position was about to change once the organization got involved with the IPF. In many ways Czechoslovakia formed a microcosm of the international situation both with regards to its ideological and national fractions. In this respect, the German freethinkers in Czechoslovakia even called one of their initiatives *Internationale Arbeitsgemeinschaft in der Tschechoslowakischen Republik* (International Cooperation in the Czechoslovak Republic), indicating a cooperation between the different nationalities within the state.[54] Once started, this drive to define socialist freethought internationally and to unify the freethought movement under this new banner continued in both Germany and Czechoslovakia. While freethought in Germany took part in the *Interessengemeinschaft für Arbeiterkultur* (Interest Group for Workers' Culture), its Czechoslovak counterparts tried to continue their coalition with bourgeois organizations by co-founding the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft kultureller Organisationen in der Tschechoslowakischen Republik* (Interest Group of Cultural Organizations in the Czechoslovak Republic) in 1923. Both were umbrella associations with a shared target: in light of diverging ideologies they should provide the ground for the fight against the common clerical enemy. No other than it was the case with the IFA, the success of these organizations was to structure and institutionalize freethought. They did not contribute substantially to its set of ideas.

Although the Czech socialist and communist freethinkers – other than the Germans – ignored international trends with the exception of expressing an

literatura v letech 1919 – 1924" (PhD diss., Filosofická fakulta, Univerzita Karlova v Praze, 2014), 61.

53 Wingfield, "Working-Class Politics," 103.

54 "Der Schutz der Interessen der Konfessionslosen in der Tschechoslowakischen Republik," *Freier Gedanke* 4, no. 11 (1923): 2. See also Rudolf Lebenhart, "Zur Vereinheitlichung der proletarischen Freidenkerbewegung in der tschechoslowakischen Republik," *Freier Gedanke* 6, no. 20 (1925): 1.

open fascination with Soviet Russia,[55] internationalism had an impact on them, even though a negative one: in line with *Komintern* policy, the newly found Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KPČ) tried to liquidate the FKOJ in late 1921 by merging it with the Czech *proletkul't* in order to create a unified structure of communist culture organizations.[56] This attempt was met with little resistance from the side of the FKOJ: an emphatic call to international communism was released at the end of 1921. With this step, die FKOJ strove to create a "world-wide league of anticlerical fighter-communists" based on the guidelines of the *Komintern* and by this subordinated itself to the party structure.[57] Ironically, the party abandoned all efforts to centralize "proletarian culture" soon afterwards, when the Soviet *proletkul't* fell out of favor of the Bolshevik leadership.[58] This in turn helped to rebuild the original FKOJ which, thanks to its decentralized structure, had apparently continued to function quite untroubled anyway.[59] The only major casualty was the FKOJ's journal *Plameny/Jiskry* (The Flames/The Sparks) with its proud prewar pedigree that was discontinued in late 1921. Despite being the strongest socialist freethought organization, this left the FKOJ even more localized than before, often serving as a template for local socialists without any connection to the Communist Party.[60]

The socialist organizations of Czech freethought, thus, did not take part in the supposedly international conferences of the German GpF in 1922, and also did not enter the IFA. In retrospect, the Czech Socialist Unbelievers criticized

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55 While the members of FKOJ were integrated into the *Komintern* structure, the Socialist Unbelievers expressed a rather general fascination that included an admiration for Russian anarchists like Piotr Alexeyevich Kropotkin.

56 Antonín Zápotocký, Stanislav K. Neumann and Ladislav Beran, "Ujednání: Z ujednání mezi zástupci výkonného výboru KSČ, Proletkultu a Federace komunistických osvětových jednot, usneseného na společné poradě dne 15. května 1922," in *KSČ a kultura: Sborník dokumentů, projevů a článků ke kulturní politice KSČ: Díl I. 1921–1948*, ed. Václav Seda (Prague: Vysoká Skola Politická ÚV KSC, 1973), 36–37.

57 "Sjezd Federace Komunistických Osvětových Jednot," *Jiskry: Orgán Federace Komunistických Osvětových Jednot* 2, no. 24 (1921): 249. This league intended to use the planned language of Ido in order to facilitate communication between its international members.

58 Ibid.

59 In early 1924, the decision to liquidate the FKOJ was officially abandoned. Membership in the KPČ and the FKOJ, thus, was possible once more. ("Aus dem Bunde," *Freier Gedanke* 5, no. 2 [1924]: 8.)

60 The German *Freidenkerbund*, in 1922, counted – not without envy – an FKOJ membership of 20,000. (*Freier Gedanke* 3, no. 1–2 [1922].) Its successor organization, the SPB, counted 17,000 members in late 1926. While these numbers are highly dubious, the other organizations in Czechoslovakia each could muster significantly less than 10,000 members.

the Magdeburg conference for its unambitious political goals, mainly targeting the reintegration of German organizations into the mainstream of freethought.[61]

The IFA for its part, with its overly compromising manifesto, its almost exclusively German character, and the virtual absence of other influential left-wing associations was no functioning institution. Symptomatically, it did not issue any further declarations. It also proved unhelpful that the German proletarian freethinkers, during the next two years, were shaken up by internal discord.[62] Despite these difficulties, the IFA still did serve its intended purpose and established a common point of reference for socialist freethinkers off the Brussels International.[63] This was ensured, for example, by the regular news item "Aus unserer Internationale" ("News from our International") in the journal of the Czechoslovak *Freidenkerbund*, which stopped referring to Brussels as "ours" and was updated later on to refer first to the IFA, then to the IPF.[64]

The IFA thus presented the future watershed concerning the ideological position of every freethought association with international ambitions. This mostly affected the bourgeois member organizations of the IFA, such as the *German Monistenbund* (German Monist League) on the one hand, and those organizations still part of the Brussels International but close to the socialist movement. As already noted, the German monists, just as the French socialist freethinkers, soon rejoined Brussels, while the German freethinkers of Czechoslovakia opted for the socialist alternative, not only for ideological, but initially also for practical reasons: "[We] will have to choose, whether to stay with the Brussels organization. And already today we have to be careful, which path to take. It is a fact that, if we need something, especially literature, we will have to turn to Germany."[65] Austrians and Poles followed this example and took the socialist path, too.[66]

In the Soviet Union, an organized anti-religious movement developed comparatively late. As mentioned before, there were no prewar socialist freethought traditions the Communist Party could rely on. In the early 1920s, the Bolsheviks realized that their earlier efforts to combat the Orthodox Church as a political actor had only transformed, not abolished religion in the Soviet Union and,

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61 Milan Matoušek, "První mezinárodní kongres socialistických bezvěrců," *Maják: Lidová revue pro socialism, kulturu a výchovu, Organ svazu socialistických bezvěrců* 1, no. 9 (1924): 120.

62 Kaiser, *Arbeiterbewegung und Religionskritik*, 146 – 148.

63 See also ibid., 189.

64 See the volumes of *Freier Gedanke* for 1922 and 1924 – 25.

65 "Der Karlsbader Bundestag," *Freier Gedanke* 4, no. 1 (1923): 2.

66 Due to a lack of basic research on both of the cases, I have to rely on circumstantial evidence given in German, Czech, and Soviet periodicals of the time.

amongst others, had furthered the revival of religious minorities. For this reason, ideological efforts were coined as "anti-religious propaganda," which was a telling term insofar, as it was a purely negative definition. Only later "scientific atheism" was placed in its stead. Although Soviet terminology was meant to serve as a distinction from liberal bourgeois freethought, such definitions stayed fluid. The IPF's member organizations were usually considered Western "godless" or anti-religious institutions.

A first comprehensive Soviet organization, the *Союз воинствующих безбожников* (*Vsesoiuznyi soiuz bezbozhnikov*, League of the Godless, from 1929 on: Militant League of the Godless, SVB) was formed in April 1925, that is, between the first official congress of proletarian freethought in Vienna and the creation of the IPF in Teplice/Schönau. As usually the case with non-party "volunteer societies," the SVB was organized mainly from above, but still included some grassroots activism contrasting the image of a joined effort to combat religion unionwide. From the beginning on, unity was as much an issue as in German and Czechoslovak freethought, because the SVB's centralized structure was working on paper only. Throughout the Soviet Union, numerous anti-religious groups formed, particularly in larger cities and usually organized around journals like *Атеист* (*Ateist*, Atheist), *Безбожник* (*Bezbozhnik*, The Godless), *Религия и наука* (*Religiia i Nauka*, Religion and Science), and *Безбожник у станка* (*Bezbozhnik u stanka*, The Godless at his Workbench),[67] attempting to put anti-religious policy on a more professional basis. It was due to the internal political success of the people behind the *Bezbozhnik* journal that the Soviet effort became known as "godlessness" on a general level.

Despite their differences, Czechs, Germans, and Soviets, therefore, were still faced with a set of structurally similar questions: one of the most pressing matters was the centralization and unification of organized socialist unbelief in each state. As proletarian freethought continued to be a very heterogeneous movement, a tool was needed to further this goal. Besides, the relationship of proletarian freethinkers to the socialist parties had to be worked out. All of the freethought organizations prided themselves in not participating in the split of the labor movement and in even trying to overcome it. In turn, the political parties mostly ignored them, or took a slightly hostile stance: the social democrats, for example, accused freethinkers of being communist lackeys.[68] Neither did the

67 Daniel Peris, in his seminal work on the SVB, has already pointed out that questions of organization were always on the forefront of the SVB's activities, partly even substituting ideology. See Peris, *Storming the Heavens*, 48–54; 195–196.

68 "Kulturpolitik – nicht Parteipolitik," *Atheist* 20, no. 2 (1924): 11–14.

newly found communist parties express a specific interest in battling religion or building an atheist culture, nor did the socialist freethinkers, in the beginning, included noted communists. Several local party cells of the German KPD, in 1923, even prohibited their members to join any freethought organization.[69]

The similarities between German Socialist Freethinkers and Czech Socialist Unbelievers stretched out also to ideological grounds: both the Czechoslovak and the German organizations felt they were at the center of a clerical counterattack, while their Soviet comrades had to deal – in a similar way – with a resilient Orthodox Church and the flourishing of smaller religious communities. A possible solution for freethinkers was to combat religion in general and to build a socialist culture which would transcend party lines. In the German and Czech cases, this meant bridging the rift of the labor movement; in the Soviet case, an anti-religious organization had to involve non-party members. The SVB even explicitely stressed the need to win over non-communists for its cause. Above all, socialist freethought was aiming to become a unified movement of its own.

The IPF and the Internationalization of Socialist Freethought

A second, more serious attempt to unite socialist freethought internationally was undertaken in Vienna in October 1924 following the call of Austrian freethinkers for an international congress of proletarian freethought. Again, this invitation was answered mostly by German and Austrian organizations, even if the congress claimed to represent fifteen associations from different countries.[70] This time, Bartošek, the representative of mainstream Czechoslovak freethought, was present. Like the liberal freethought delegates at the Magdeburg conference in 1922, he expressed reservations about breaking with Brussels. According to him, the IFF was already on its way to becoming socialist and could be expected to turn proletarian soon. In Vienna, however, members of the German GpF were present and Arthur Wolf, its secretary, again linked the IFF's exclusion of German organizations to its insufficient socialist worldview. The congress, then, published fourteen guidelines on the necessarily socialist character of free-

69 Kaiser, *Arbeiterbewegung und Religionskritik*, 141.
70 Arthur Wolf, "Der erste internationale Kongress proletarischer Freidenker," *Atheist* 20, no. 20 (1924): 125–131.

thought and sent them to Brussels as the conditions to be fulfilled to avoid the establishment of a second international organization.[71]

The IFF could only decline these Vienna guidelines, and while the Germans were looking forward to breaking with Brussels, the Czechs were either hoping to maintain the common framework or suspicious of the German predominance in Vienna. National and ideological fault lines did not completely overlap, as the Germans and Austrians were mostly social democrats, whereas the more radical Czech Socialist Unbelievers tended to agree with Bartošek's judgement of the IFF becoming proletarian on its own.[72] In general, the Czechs seemed to be rather surprised by these recent developments: several socialist groups from Czechoslovakia attended the Vienna congress, but they were unsure what to make of it. The Socialist Unbelievers, for their part, agreed with the general idea of uniting socialist freethought, but noticed that Wolf's policy to link Brussel's anti-German bias to its lack of socialist ideology was actually a very weak argument and did not suffice to justify the foundation of a new international organization, especially, if the latter could not come up with a socialist doctrine of its own. They were also annoyed that *Volná Myšlenka's* Bartošek would speak for all Czechs.[73]

Once the IFF rejected the Vienna guidelines as the basis for further cooperation, the provisory leadership of the new International, consisting of Bartošek for the VM, Wolf for the GpF, and Karl Frantzl for the *Freidenkerbund Österreich* (Freethinker League of Austria), continued with its preparations for a constituent congress. Along the way, the Soviet SVB first entered the European scene: one Russian activist from Leningrad, Andrei Rostovcev-Blauberg, apparently by chance discovered a brochure of proletarian freethought that had found its way to his hometown. According to his lecture held at the founding congress of the SVB in April 1925, he realized that there were "godless" in Germany and Czechoslovakia, too. Thanks to his knowledge of German he was able to contact the secretary of the GpF in Leipzig, Arthur Wolf.[74] For several months, Rostovcev figured as the main link between the Germans in the IPF and the Soviet godless movement. He became the main correspondent for the Leipzig based IPF journal *Der Atheist* (The Atheist), reporting from the aforementioned constituent con-

71 Kaiser, *Arbeiterbewegung und Religionskritik*, 189 – 191.

72 J. H., "Snahy po sjednocení bezvěreckého hnutí," *Maják: Lidová revue pro socialism, kulturu a výchovu, Organ svazu socialistických bezvěrců* 2, no. 3 (1925): 36 – 38.

73 Matoušek, "První mezinárodní kongres."

74 For a detailed approach to Rostovcev-Blauberg, see E. S. Tokareva, "Komintern i Internacional proletarskich svobodomyslsljaščich v bor'be protiv religii i Vatikana," *Istorija: Ėlektronnyj naučno-obrazovatel'nyj žurnal* 9, no. 4 (2018), http://history.jes.su/s207987840002215-5-1. See also "Pis'mo I. P. F. v Bezbožnik," *Antireligioznik* 1, no. 1 (1926): 80 – 81.

gress of the godless and sending greetings from Soviet Russia to the German comrades. Rostovcev was obviously no high ranking official because he differed notably from other Soviet activists in style and substance.[75] Still, he managed to be appointed representative for the SVB and to sign the IPF statute, even though he did not attend the founding congress in Teplice.

The leadership of the SVB was not fully aware of this development. They had not wasted any thought on the fact that the IPF was an organization with a significant social democratic influence, probably because Rostovcev, in his Moscow lecture, had praised his German comrades almost excessively as "true proletarians." Rostovcev himself seemed to know that he actually was in no position to speak for the whole SVB which is why he signed the statutes only conditionally, provided that the Moscow leadership would agree. On the Soviet side, there was significant confusion on the responsibility for the anti-religious policy abroad. The *Komintern*, although being taken by surprise by the events as well, was aware of the forming international proletarian freethought movement, but criticized it initially as a social democratic enterprise. Rostovcev even contacted the *Komintern Agitprop* department, but complained of not obtaining any directives on how to proceed.[76] In the end it was decided that the emerging godless organization should participate in the IPF, as Soviet organizations could not ignore this internationalization. A clash of competences seemed inevitable, especially when the SVB established its own *иностранный отдел* (*inostrannyi otdel*, foreign section) in 1926, led by an ethnic German from Russia, M. Shvab.[77] Additionally, all delegations abroad had to report to and were instructed by the *Komintern*.[78] Both the SVB and the *Komintern* were aware of social democratic influences in the IPF, but while the former dismissed freethinking, the latter grasped the opportunity interpreted as useful abroad and at home.[79]

Due to this confusion, Frantzl, the acting secretary, felt obliged to write to the editorial office of the journal *Bezbozhnik* in Moscow, asking for clarification. The executive bureau of the SVB sent a letter back to Vienna – the new seat of

75 Rostovcev hardly ever referred to Leninism and never mentioned the official leadership of the League of the Godless, instead praising known Bolsheviks as "Freidenker" ("freethinkers"). Andrei Rostowzeff, "Der Kongreß der 'Gottlosen' in Moskau," *Atheist* 21, no. 9 (1925): 77–80.
76 Tokareva, "Komintern i Internacional," 4–7.
77 "Die Freidenkerbewegung in Sowjetrußland: Referat des Genossen Jaroslawsky, Vorsitzender der Organisation der 'Gottlosen' und Chefredakteur der freisinnigen Zeitungen," *Freier Gedanke* 7, no. 20 (1926): 1.
78 Tokareva, "Komintern i Internacional," 11.
79 See the discussions of the executive committee of the SVB in 1926: Gosudarstvennyj arkhiv Rossiiskoi federacii (State Archive of the Russian Federation, GARF), fond R5407, opis' 1, delo 11.

the IPF after having been moved from Leipzig – simultaneously printed in Russian in its main theoretical journal, *Антирелигиозник* (*Antireligioznik*, The Antireligious).[80] This letter took a surprisingly hostile stance toward the organization, criticizing its vague language with regard to class struggle and demanding a clear break from the Second (social democratic) International, something the IPF leadership in Vienna could obviously not agree to. Still, the SVB did join the IPF. Its harsh reaction was most probably aimed at a Soviet audience: the suspicions of the *Komintern* had to be placated and the SVB leadership, at that time, was under pressure from its local competitors to take a more aggressive stance toward religion.[81]

The founding congress of the IPF took place in the Czechoslovak town of Teplice on May 31 and June 1, 1925. Next to the GpF, several other German organizations took part, two Austrian ones, one French organization from Alsace-Lorraine, and one from Poland. From Czechoslovakia, only the Communist FKOJ and the German *Freidenkerbund* attended, the Socialist Unbelievers, still present in Vienna, apparently stayed away. The SVB, which the congress addressed as "proletarian freethinkers of Russia," was formally represented by Ladislav Beran, the representative of the FKOJ.[82] Theodor Hartwig from Brno, who had made his mark as a leading publicist among German-speaking freethinkers, became the IPF's first chairman. Next to him, the board of the new International consisted of representatives from each member state, including Russia (Rostovcev), Czechoslovakia (Beran), Germany (Wolf), France (Fritsch), and Poland (Mierczinsky). The Austrian representative, Frantzl, became general secretary.[83] While in the German GpF continuous struggles between social democrats and communists made it necessary to balance the party influence in its executive committee, the IPF board did not include any high-ranking cadres of either party, with the minor exception of Beran.

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80 "Ispolnitel'nomu Komitetu Internacionala Proletarskich Vol'nodumcev," *Antireligioznik* 1, no. 1 (1926): 74–79.

81 The Godless Division of the Moscow party organization and the All-Union League of the Godless were involved in endless disputes. These disagreements balanced out only in 1929 which proves that for most of the decade anti-religious policies were no major concern for the Soviet government. For further information, see Peris, *Storming the Heavens*, 51–56; and Sandra Dahlke, *"An der antireligiösen Front": Der Verband der Gottlosen in der Sowjetunion der zwanziger Jahre* (Hamburg: Kovač, 1998), 51–74.

82 Both Czechoslovak communist delegates, Beran and Viktor Stern, apparently had contacts with Soviet comrades before, but no access to the godless movement. (See "Pis'mo.")

83 Rudolf Lebenhart, "Die Internationale proletarischer Freidenker," *Freier Gedanke* 6, no. 12 (1925): 1. See also Kaiser, *Arbeiterbewegung und Religionskritik*, 191–195.

As Jochen-Christoph Kaiser has pointed out, the Czech communist influence became manifest especially in the main guidelines of the new International. Another representative of the KPČ, Viktor Stern, "sharpened" the Vienna guidelines, making them more exclusive with regard to non-socialist freethought. The new version also stressed the need for revolutionary political action and the ideological primacy of economic conditions.[84] Apart from molding the IPF doctrine according to his own communist believes, Stern may also have come to a similar conclusion as the Czech Socialist Unbelievers in Vienna. Both stressed the ideological differences between Brussels and Vienna in order to avoid turning the new International into a simple tool for German negotiations with Brussels. But while the IPF stressed its non-party affiliation, obvious ideological overlaps with the communist doctrine were hard to overlook. The call for class struggle might have been quite in line with the general socialist freethinker agenda and largely consistent with the common critique of the social democratic programmatic, however, vital questions remained open. Hartwig and others clearly took freethought as an independent socialist enterprise that provided workers with spiritual fulfillment. To them, freethought constituted the "third pillar" of the labor movement – next to the parties and the trade unions. Orthodox communists like Stern, on the other hand, considered freethinkers' activities rooted in active class struggle and bound to its economic conditions. As long as the Marxist-Leninist doctrine was shaped by major ideological gaps, not too many causes for ideological conflict with communism arose. Leading IPF figures like Hartwig and Wolf, both no members of any communist party, shared the communist critique of the social democratic program with regard to religion. In turn, the SVB, while aggressively insisting on a clear break with mainstream social democracy for political reasons, was less strict than activists like Stern and some of his German comrades. After all, the leadership of the SVB was embroiled in an ideological struggle with the independent Moscow based godless organization that mirrored the differences between Stern and Hartwig. Notwithstanding the SVB's vital interest in casting godlessness and freethought as a socialist doctrine of its own, it called for Leninism.[85]

The IPF impacted lastingly on the German and Czechoslovak freethought discourse: in its internal struggles, the German GpF tied in with the IPF's call for unity to stress the need for concord also in Germany. As early as August 1925, the board of the IPF was invited to negotiate between different GpF factions

84 Ibid., 192.
85 Ibid.

in this sense.[86] The dynamics unleashed by the IPF's founding also influenced the liberal-bourgeois VM: Czechoslovakia's most prominent case was Bartošek, who, together with other socialist freethinkers like Vrbenský and Landová-Štychová, had been expelled from the Czechoslovak socialists in 1923. After the founding of the IPF, he unsuccessfully tried to work toward a cooperation of traditional freethinkers with the new proletarian ones in Brussels and at home. In autumn 1925, shortly after having joined the Communist Party, he toured the Soviet Union as part of a group of Czech intellectuals. Being the only freethinker, he was greeted quite warmly by the godless press and spoke on the anniversary of the October Revolution. In his lecture, he linked the revolution to the history of the "anti-religious" movements in the West. This ideological nexus, once again, highlights the common interest of freethinkers like Bartošek and the godless movement in the Soviet Union: both grasped revolutionary socialism not only as a political, but as a spiritual revolution with freethought as an integral part of the world revolution.[87] Upon his return, Bartošek reported to the Czech press and – adopting Soviet lingo – praised the Soviet state's "nenáboženský" ("non-religious") attitude which allowed for an intensified "protináboženský" ("anti-religious") propaganda.[88] He was proactive in two directions, stating his message to the Communist Party, and equally hoping to join the Czechoslovak freethinkers with the IPF. To him, chances for such an alliance seemed good, as there were still many communists in the VM's ranks. But Bartošek failed to win a majority and his tenure in the VM came to an end. Together with several other well-regarded freethinkers of the VM's left wing such as Otakar Kunstovný and Zdeněk Lahulek-Faltys, he left the organization and, in December 1925, found the *Spolek volných myslitelů Augustín Smetana* (Society of Freethinkers Augustín Smetana, SVMAS), a splinter freethought organization which claimed to be the only true representative of worldwide freethought in Czechoslovakia and subsequently applied for IPF membership.[89] The split from VM occurred

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86 "Die proletarische Freidenker-Internationale an die proletarischen Freidenker Deutschlands," *Atheist* 21, no. 6 (1925): 61. For details on the internal strife shaking the GpF, see Kaiser, *Arbeiterbewegung und Religionskritik*, 156–158.

87 "D-r Bartošek," *Bezbožnik* 1, no. 1 (1926): 13.

88 Theodor Bartošek, "Naše první studijní výprava do SSSR," *Nové Rusko* 1, no. 10–11 (1925): 257–260.

89 The splinter organization's name was a reference to Augustín Smetana, an excommunicated priest and revolutionary of 1848–49. Czech freethinkers regarded him as one of their founding fathers. See "Aus der Bewegung," *Atheist* 22, no. 9 (1926): 140–141; and Antonín K. K. Kudláč, *Příběh(y) Volné myšlenky* (Prague: Nakl. Lidové Noviny, 2005), 78–79.

after the factions accused each other of "politicizing" freethought by either being too loyal to the republic or by siding with the communists.[90]

In the meantime, the Socialist Unbelievers and the FKOJ, for their part, were already negotiating a merger. With the new IPF in sight, they also approached the German *Freidenkerbund* of Czechoslovakia. Contrary to their previous stance, the Socialist Unbelievers praised the IPF as a basis for the different groups to come together.[91] In 1926, the FKOJ renamed itself the *Svaz proletářských bezvěrců* (League of Proletarian Unbelievers, SPB) and subsequently merged with the Socialist Unbelievers for good. The SVMAS splinter group likewise gladly took the opportunity to join the new SPB. Although they never had any affiliation with Marxism or social democracy before, these activists from now on provided the bulk of the Czech Proletarian Unbelievers' journalistic output. Besides, negotiations to merge the united SPB with the German *Freidenkerbund* of Czechoslovakia continued.

In the Soviet Union, the *Научное Общество Атеист* (*Nauchnoe Obshchestvo Ateist*, Scientific Society "Atheist"), another representative of organized atheism, asked for joining the IPF and became the second Soviet organization in its ranks. Both the SVB and *Ateist* were eager to make use of the international connections to influence politics at home. While the SVB invited several freethinkers from Germany and Czechoslovakia to visit the Soviet Union and organized public and scholarly discussions on the research of religion, the society *Ateist* started to extensively translate and print articles written by German freethinkers in its journal of the same name, advertising this activity as an important step toward accessing the situation in the West.[92] The main journal of the SVB published some translated articles as well, mostly by the same authors. Both journals also repeatedly issued the statutes of the newly found IPF, not only to inform their readers, but also to prove their own relevance to the Communist Party.[93]

With the Soviet godless movement fully on board, the IPF seemed to have entered the road to success. In 1926, it claimed to represent more than one million proletarian freethinkers – and rising. Several other freethought organizations from all over Europe showed an interest in joining its ranks. The IPF's national member organizations seemed to start an ambitious transnational cooperation. Reports about the new Soviet society filled the pages of freethought

90 "Členům Volné myšlenky československé!," *Volný Myslitel* 1, no. 21 (1926): 3.

91 J. H., "Snahy po sjednocení."

92 In February 1926, five of six articles were translations of foreign authors, three of them from German socialists like Heinrich Eildermann and Theodor Hartwig.

93 Both journals competed with each other openly, also on the level of their leading authors, who frequently criticized each other.

journals in Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. In turn, leading German freethinkers, social democrats, and communists alike, were published in the anti-religious press, most of all Hartwig.

The two most important mergers left were those of the German GpF with the social democratic VfF in Berlin, and the creation of a transnational proletarian freethought organization in Czechoslovakia. Again, the IPF was supervising the negotiations, with the Soviet IPF representative Lukachevskii being present.[94] In Germany, the merger was realized in 1927, thus creating, if not a single, at least a dominating German organization of proletarian freethought.[95] The negotiations of the *Freidenkerbund* and the Socialist Unbelievers in Czechoslovakia, planned for early 1927, made good progress as well.

After the first year, the results of the IPF were indeed impressive: in Czechoslovakia and Germany, proletarian freethinkers had settled some of their major disputes and had started to create unified national freethought associations. All of these negotiations were already underway when the IPF was established and could, therefore, be interpreted as both an effect and a cause of the new international cooperation. Even though the IPF could not wield any real power over its member associations, it was able to leverage its representative authority to form a common international body of socialist freethought and to define guidelines for the merging of the heterogeneous national associations. Most of all, it provided a quite powerful platform for those, who saw socialist freethought as a non-party movement and strove to overcome the split between social democrats and communists.

In 1926, the attempts to cooperate peaked, when a large group of German freethinkers from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia set out for a seven-week journey through the Soviet Union "from Leningrad to Baku" and back again, as one participant summarized it.[96] "Soviet tourism" at that time was an expanding industry with many intellectuals and journalists marveling at revolutionary Russia. In turn, the Bolsheviks embraced the opportunity for extended propaganda. The tour group of freethinkers was special insofar as it consisted of convinced socialists and other sympathizers with the Soviet religious policy but was not dominated by communists. Besides, they were apparently special guests of the SVB with several GpF officials taking part in the sessions of the SVB executive committee.[97]

94 "Aus unserer Internationale," *Freier Gedanke* 8, no. 3 (1927): 5.

95 For further reading, see Kaiser, *Arbeiterbewegung und Religionskritik*, 173–177.

96 Erich Mäder, *Zwischen Leningrad und Baku: Was sah ein proletarischer Freidenker in Sowjetrussland?* (Windischleuba: Hans Schumann, 1926).

97 See GARF, Fond R5407, opis' 1, delo 10.

After his return, Erich Mäder, one of the social democrats, authored a general sympathizing but at times sharply critical travel report. Like his fellow traveler Erich Vogl, who was neither a freethinker nor a socialist, but a modernist priest, Mäder was very impressed by the efforts of Soviet society in combating religion.[98] His critique concerned certain details of Soviet everyday life and culture and most of all the broad suppression of non-Bolshevik socialists. Nonetheless, the Soviet way of life obviously fascinated non-communists across party lines and invoked the vision of a new secular socialist culture.[99] The godless movement, thus, became a representative of socialism and socialist culture abroad.

To draw a first conclusion on the IPF's impact, it might be stated that its success was always presented as a reason and model for uniting the differing factions of socialist freethought on national levels. What is more, the international movement with its strong unifying drive even seemed to dominate the national developments. To a certain degree, this was caused by the IPF's ability to circumvent factional ideological clashes that could not be avoided on national and regional grounds with its very concrete power struggles. In the new organization, ideological cleavages seemed secondary. The IPF was dominated by non-party socialists who envisioned a radical socialist, but nonetheless non-communist atheist society. Both social democrats and communists in the IPF played along.

Crisis and Split, 1928–1930

The IPF's credo of supporting all socialist parties that favored the separation of church and state and refused to cooperate with the "clericals," and social democratic parties entering "capitalist" or "clerical" governments all over Europe evoked latent tensions. Once the German proletarian freethought organizations split up in the wake of social democratic support for a "clerical" candidate to run for president, the IPF sided with the critics. But although the IPF was ideologically closer to the communist parties, it did not approve its strict party discipline increasingly enforced by Moscow.

In her report about her experiences in Soviet Russia, the German communist Anna Lindemann, in a journal of the godless movement, stressed that the ques-

98 Mäder, *Zwischen Leningrad und Baku*; and Carl Vogl, *Sowjet-Rußland: Wie ein deutscher Pfarrer es sah und erlebte* (Leipzig: Oswald Mutze, 1927).

99 The fascination Western visitors experienced once faced with godlessness and state atheism could be the topic of a separate research project.

tion of religion or non-religion was a political and not simply a cultural one.[100] In the same way Viktor Stern sharply criticized Austrian social democracy and the Austrian branch of the IPF which – just as the German *Freidenkerbund* of Czechoslovakia – had evolved directly from the bourgeois organization by "proletarizing" itself. With regard to the IPF's guidelines, he repeated his critique of religion as a private matter.[101] While the non-communists fully agreed, they did not accept supremacy of communist politics over the common freethought cause.[102]

These differences could be ignored as long as organizational work continued. But the intended mergers of German and Czechoslovakian socialist freethought associations did, in the end, not work out. While the GpF and the VfF found common grounds and united, several smaller groups – many of them communist – either never went through with the plan to merge, or split off the GpF right before the union was sealed.[103] In the same way, negotiations between the *Freidenkerbund* and the SPB in Czechoslovakia were stalled. Negotiations never went past the agreement on the formal conditions for the union in May 1927.[104] This was partly caused by the renewed alignment of national and ideological fault lines: the SPB journal, *Maják* (Lighthouse), attacked the communist Lebenhart, the secretary of the *Freidenkerbund*, because he had dared to complain about KPČ behavior to the German proletarian freethinkers.[105] The *Freidenkerbund*, in turn, refused communist meddling in its own affairs and, subsequently, criticized the SPB for clearly leaning toward one political direction.[106]

By 1928, Leninist orthodoxy had been established in the Soviet Union and all the communist parties were pressured to conformity. Again, this new political orthodoxy was not too outspoken on religious topics. Still, the godless movement seized the moment and declared once and for all that a true socialist worldview was tantamount with dialectical materialism, which left no place for religion – not even in private matters. This was still compatible with the IPF's principles, but communist tactics soon led to open conflict.

When the IPF met for its third congress in Cologne, no one expected the crisis in the national associations would spread to the international level. Hartwig,

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100 A. Lindeman, "Bor'ba s religiej v Sovetskom Sojuze," *Antireligioznik* 1, no. 11 (1926): 18.
101 V. Štern, "Otnošenie avstriiskoi social-demokratii k religii i cerkvi," *Antireligioznik* 1, no. 11 (1926): 19–25.
102 Rudolf Lebenhart, "Freidenkerbund und KPČ," *Freier Gedanke* 8, no. 1 (1927): 1–2.
103 Kaiser, *Arbeiterbewegung und Religionskritik*, 178.
104 Ladislav Beran, "Slučování bezvěreckého hnutí," *Maják* 3, no. 22 (1926–27): 282–284.
105 A. Singer, "Bezvěrectví a politické strany," *Maják* 3, no. 16 (1926–27): 195–196.
106 "Aus dem Bunde," *Freier Gedanke* 9, no. 12 (1928): 7.

the chairman, had actually largely agreed with the communist critique, and was himself referenced by the communists. Besides, for the first time, the SVB delegate, Lukachevskii, obtained approval by German authorities to attend. Still optimistic, Hartwig even attributed the IPF to be a role model for socialist internationalism in general. But the communist delegates chose a collision course: they suggested a resolution that condemned social democratic leaders and their supposedly treasonous policy toward Soviet Russia. While the German and Austrian delegates voted against this resolution, all the others were in favor. It passed with a narrow majority, particularly because the non-communist German *Freidenkerbund* of Czechoslovakia voted in favor and, by this, secured the communist majority.[107] As Lebenhart explained in retrospect, the *Freidenkerbund* had considered this conflict an internal issue of the GpF that had spread to the IPF.[108]

But the damage was irreparable. Hartwig took a stance against the resolution which he considered not only as a communist, but as a Soviet infringement. Throughout the years 1928 and 1929 he exchanged verbal blows with Lukachevskii in the IPF press. Backed by the German, Austrian, and Czechoslovak social democratic organizations, he took over control of the official IPF journal, while the Soviet SVB continued to agitate against the IPF leadership in its own journals and supported the oppositional communists among the GpF. The Czech SPB also attacked both the social democrats and the German *Freidenkerbund*, shattering the possibility of a united proletarian freethought movement in Czechoslovakia. In turn, only a small minority of the *Freidenkerbund's* local chapters aligned with the SPB and the Communist Party. Rudolf Lebenhart was expelled from the KPČ, when he defended the *Freidenkerbund's* independent stance. As a consequence, the IPF de facto and quite abruptly stopped functioning after Cologne.

This split, however, should not be reduced to pure communist tactics as it rooted in long existing fault lines. In retrospect, it seems astonishing how late this conflict openly manifested. One corollary was the SVB's failure to create an independent socialist atheist culture of their own. In search for allies, they were prepared to enter *Komintern* territory. When, in 1928, the SVB encountered a local organization of German freethinkers in Düsseldorf, they were impressed by its revolutionary fervor and willingness to attack the social democrats.[109] But as the SVB did not exactly know whom they were dealing with, they contacted the KPD leadership in Berlin. The German communists, for their part, reacted with appall and warned the SVB of cooperating with the Düsseldorf group,

107 Kaiser, *Arbeiterbewegung und Religionskritik*, 199 – 203.
108 Rudolf Lebenhart, "Der III. Kongress der IPF," *Freier Gedanke* 9, no. 3 (1928): 2 – 4.
109 Most probably one of the anarcho-syndicalist GpF splinter factions.

whose members most certainly were not communist, but "syndicalist." However, as a delegate of the godless movement at the IPF congress in Cologne noted in June 1928, in light of the lacking organization of German communist freethinkers, the oppositional syndicalists were actually valuable allies.[110] Still, in 1929, Lukachevskii complained in the Russian press that "the communist parties to this day did not really acknowledge the significance [...] of the movement of proletarian freethinkers as a genuine mass movement."[111] The Cologne resolution should, therefore, also be taken as a document of the godless movement's failure to secure, at least partly, independence from the Bolshevik leadership. This is not to deny the obvious attempts to subvert social democratic organizations all over Europe after 1929 – a mirror of the path to Stalinism in the Soviet Union.[112] At the same time, the SVB started to confront non-communists in the IPF more aggressively: it changed its internal course, now trying to eradicate religion by suppressing the believers.[113]

In 1930, the IPF finally split up into two factions, both claiming to represent the organization. While the social democratic wing soon enough moved closer to the Brussels International, the (smaller) communist wing tried to establish the label "IPF" for its own goals without major success. By 1936, all the factions gathered again in Prague at the last congress of the worldwide freethought movement before the upcoming war. By then, the German and Austrian organizations had stopped functioning. But also the Soviet godless movement had passed its zenith: during the 1930s, it was virtually abolished by the Communist Party.

Conclusion

The history of the IPF appears as a failed attempt to integrate two different wings of the socialist movement. While this assessment is certainly true, it is worth considering more closely the origins of the conflict that surfaced in the year 1928. The communist members of the PFT were set on a collision course with their colleagues after the *Komintern* had declared all social democratic parties to be "social traitors" and "social fascists" – a slogan that the German and Czech commu-

110 See GARF, Fond R5407, opis' 1, delo 16.

111 Quoted in Tokareva, "Komintern i Internacional," 20.

112 For a similar case of subversion, see the *Freie Schulgesellschaften* (Free School Societies) in Germany: Siegfried Heimann and Franz Walter, *Religiöse Sozialisten und Freidenker in der Weimarer Republik* (Berlin: Dietz, 1993).

113 Daniel Peris, "The 1929 Congress of the Godless," *Soviet Studies* 43, no. 4 (1991): 711–732.

nists employed eagerly. The godless movement accepted these labels as they fit its own radicalizing agenda.[114] Still, in both the German and the Czechoslovak examples, other explanatory approaches have to be considered. As this chapter has emphasized, the PFT furthered a self-image of being part of the worldwide socialist movement. But contrary to the socialists, these leftist freethinkers directly connected the economic liberation of the workers to their spiritual emancipation. From the very beginning, they were much less willing and able to compromise. Even though they sometimes tolerated coalitions of socialist and bourgeois parties, alliances with the churches, taken as the real class enemy, were taboo. Interestingly enough both the German and the Czechoslovak Republics started to enter into dialogue with the Catholic Church roughly the same time as freethinkers radicalized, namely during the second half of the 1920s. Consequently, the radical parts of the PFT felt betrayed by their own secularly constituted republics. This was particularly true for the federal state of Prussia, whose social democratic government signed a concordat with the Catholic Church in 1929. This rapprochement mostly reflected the postwar order, but served as initial spark for the PFT which saw convincing evidence for the collusion between the social democratic governments and the clerical powers. Consequently, freethinkers were particularly alarmed by the fact that confessional schools continued to exist and enjoyed certain legal prerogatives. The Soviet SVB, on the other hand, repeatedly used the IPF press to assure the broader public that no such agreement between church and state was to be realized in Soviet Russia.

Caught between an intransigent and increasingly Stalinist *Komintern* and a concordat of church and state, not much space was left for the proletarian freethinkers who, by definition, held secularist views, including the separation of church and state and the idea that for socialist parties a commitment to a non-religious culture was an essential ideological prerequisite. What is more, the IPF appeared to be a very “Austrian” organization with its power base (if any) mostly among the German freethinkers of Czechoslovakia and Austria. These were not by chance the only regions in Central Europe where the split between social democrats and communists had only a minor impact. The IPF’s leading personnel consisted of non-party socialists who tried to make fruitful the international IPF in order to strengthen the unity of the labor movement on a national level. This undertaking was probably doomed from the beginning, but should still be recognized as a significant contribution to the interwar history of socialism and secularism.

114 Michail Šejnman, “Komintern i religija,” *Antireligioznik* 3, no. 11 (1928): 6–22.

Proletarian freethought, in its organized form, from the very beginning strove to exceed the existing currents of freethought in two crucial aspects. First, it hoped to launch a mass movement, intending to bring a new way of life to the whole working class. Second, it wanted to be more than an enlightened alternative to church belief. Instead, it considered religion in public and religion in private to be identical and tried to counter both.

Interestingly, proletarian freethought as a historical cultural phenomenon had to rely heavily on established freethought practices:[115] when, in 1931, communist freethinkers visited the Soviet Union and inquired about new "communist" rituals, they were pushed aside. As the head of the godless movement, Iaroslavskii, explained, such rituals did exist simply because some people in rural areas demanded it. But, as he declared, such acts had nothing whatsoever to do with godlessness or socialist freethought.[116] The *raison d'être* of proletarian freethought, therefore, rested on its political impact: socialist secularism as represented by the IPF never consisted of any new content beyond the already established secular rituals in the tradition of nineteenth-century freethought. It was precisely this political focus which led to the clash with social democracy and orthodox communism: both were not all too interested in diluting their ideological core. Once the communists embraced the IPF and its member organizations as useful tools, they soon became empty shells.

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115 See the chapter of Antoine Mandret-Degeilh in this volume.
116 E. Jaroslawski, *Die Gottlosenbewegung in der Sowjetunion: Rede in der gemeinsamen Sitzung des Arbeiterpräsidiums des Bundes Streitbarer Gottloser in der UdSSR mit der internationalen Delegation Proletarischer Freidenker, gehalten am 6. November 1931* (Moscow: Verlagsgenossenschaft ausländischer Arbeiter in der UdSSR, 1933), with an introduction of A. Lukatschewski.

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III Freethinkers' Networks and Projects Critically Revised

Claus Spenninger

A Movement That Never Materialized: The Perception of Scientific Materialism as a Secular Movement in Nineteenth-Century Germany

In November 1855, Rudolph Wagner, a renowned German anatomist and physiologist, wrote an urgent letter to the famous chemist Justus von Liebig. As a devout and conservative Protestant, Wagner warned Liebig of what he believed to be an emerging atheist movement in Germany that took its arguments from the natural sciences. More specifically, he warned his colleague of the "Vogt-Moleschott-Büchnersche [...] Materialismus, der uns mit einem neuen Zeitalter der Barbarei bedroht" ("materialism of Vogt-Moleschott-Büchner which threatens us with a new era of barbarism").[1]

At that time, Wagner was in the midst of a polemical public debate with the materialist zoologist Carl Vogt (1817–1895). The two had entered into a severe dispute over the relationship between Christianity and modern science. While Wagner argued for compatibility, Vogt sought to present atheism as a logical consequence of the natural sciences. In his letter to Liebig, Wagner not only mentioned Vogt, but also referenced the other two main protagonists of what became known as "scientific materialism": the Dutch physiologist Jacob Moleschott (1822–1893) and the German physician Ludwig Büchner (1824–1899). In the German-speaking world of the 1850s, these three men were widely read and highly controversial figures. Through the medium of popular science writing they promoted the idea that everything, even life itself, was to be explained solely by the laws of matter. They claimed that human beings were just natural products and that neither God nor an immaterial soul would exist. Even thought and behavior, according to this reading, were determined by matter. In consequence, the materialists also denied human free will and the existence of an absolute morality.[2]

1 Wagner to Liebig, Göttingen, November 19, 1855, BSB Liebigiana II B, Wagner, Rudolf. Translations are my own.

2 Among the most widely read materialist books were Jacob Moleschott, *Lehre der Nahrungsmittel: Für das Volk* (Erlangen: Ferdinand Enke, 1850); Carl Vogt, *Untersuchungen über Thierstaaten* (Frankfurt/Main: Literarische Anstalt J. Rütten, 1851); Jacob Moleschott, *Der Kreislauf des Lebens: Physiologische Antworten auf Liebig's Chemische Briefe* (Mainz: Victor v. Zabern, 1852); Carl Vogt, *Köhlerglaube und Wissenschaft: Eine Streitschrift gegen Hofrath Rudolph Wagner in Göttingen* (Gießen: J. Ricker'sche Buchhandlung, 1855); Ludwig Büchner, *Kraft und Stoff: Empirisch-natur-*

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The 1850s, in Germany, were shaped by the failing of the Revolutions of 1848–49 and the subsequent political reaction.[3] The case of scientific materialism illustrates how irreligion and supposedly scientific arguments were used to express political dissent during this period. It also shows that Germany witnessed controversial debates over the compatibility of Christianity and modern science already in the decade before Charles Darwin's publication of the *Origin of Species* (1859).[4] The materialists' aggressive combination of science and atheism caused many contemporaries to come forward against what they saw as an abuse of science for ideological purposes. There are different interpretations at play on whether materialism can count as an actual secular movement comparable to Ernst Haeckel's and Wilhelm Ostwald's later monist movement.[5] Some scholars explicitly refer to a "materialist movement"[6] or even to Vogt, Moleschott, and Büchner as the "leaders of the radical materialist movement."[7] In contrast, others argue more cautiously that within nineteenth-century German secularism "the radical, anti-Christian materialists remained a minority."[8] Owen Chadwick emphasized that while the materialists had many readers, they did not have "a hierarchy, a cult, an organization."[9] Frederick Gregory

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philosophische Studien, In allgemein-verständlicher Darstellung (Frankfurt/Main: Meidinger Sohn & Cie., 1855).

3 While the revolution had failed, the 1850s did not intend a complete return to the status quo ante. Democratic and liberal agency remained an important factor in the public. For the post-revolutionary years, see the detailed study by Christian Jansen, *Einheit, Macht und Freiheit: Die Paulskirchenlinke und die deutsche Politik in der nachrevolutionären Epoche 1849–1867* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2000).

4 For the reception of Darwinism in Germany, see William M. Montgomery, "Germany," in *The Comparative Reception of Darwinism*, ed. Thomas F. Glick (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, ^{2}1988), 81–116.

5 For the monist movement in Wilhelmine Germany, see Todd Weir, *Secularism and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Germany: The Rise of the Fourth Confession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 253–268.

6 Kurt Bayertz, "Spreading the Spirit of Science: Social Determinants of the Popularization of Science in Nineteenth-Century Germany," in *Expository Science: Forms and Functions of Popularization*, ed. Terry Shinn and Richard Whitley (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1985), 220.

7 Peter C. Caldwell, *Love, Death, and Revolution in Central Europe: Ludwig Feuerbach, Moses Hess, Louise Dittmar, Richard Wagner* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 59.

8 Andreas W. Daum, "Science, Politics, and Religion: Humboldtian Thinking and the Transformation of Civil Society in Germany, 1830–1870," *Osiris, 2nd Series* 17 (2002): 136.

9 Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, ^{2}1993), 173.

speaks of an "entire movement"[10] while also noting that the materialists "had never joined forces formally."[11]

The characterization of scientific materialism as a secular movement remains disputed. Historian Todd Weir observes that "a clearly secularist movement" in Germany would only "emerge by the 1860s."[12] What, then, should one make of the phenomenon of scientific materialism in the 1850s? Was it composed of a few isolated authors or did it, in fact, form a whole movement? And how did it relate to the broader range of nineteenth-century secularism? The term "social movement" in use for these phenomena often remains vague. As Charles Tilly observed, "no one owns the term."[13] In his own definition, Tilly identified as central elements "campaigns of collective claims on target authorities," "claim-making performances including special-purpose associations" as well as "public representations of the cause's worthiness, unity, members, and commitment."[14] Others have stressed a "large number of involved persons"[15] and a "distinctive feeling of cohesiveness"[16] as important constituents. Furthermore, political scientist Joachim Raschke states that while social movements are not defined by a specific form of organization, they "generally do not exist without organization."[17]

Based on these considerations, I argue that materialism in the 1850s did not constitute a cohesive secular movement. The case of scientific materialism confirms the heterogeneity of secular identities in the nineteenth century. Its proponents barely displayed a feeling of cohesiveness or attempted to campaign for collective claims. The materialists also did not create associations dedicated to their views. However, scientists, theologians, and philosophers who fought against materialism in the 1850s still perceived it to be an organized, growing

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10 Frederick Gregory, *Scientific Materialism in Nineteenth Century Germany* (Dordrecht/Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1977), 7. To this day, Gregory's book is the most thorough study on the topic.

11 Gregory, *Materialism*, 2.

12 Weir, *Secularism*, 6.

13 Charles Tilly, *Social Movements, 1768–2004* (Boulder/London: Paradigm Publishers, 2004), 7.

14 Ibid., 7.

15 Harald Bender, *Die Zeit der Bewegung – Strukturdynamik und Transformationsprozesse: Beiträge zur Theorie sozialer Bewegungen und zur Analyse kollektiven Handelns* (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 1997), 54.

16 Joachim Raschke, *Soziale Bewegungen: Ein historisch-systematischer Grundriß* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 1985), 78.

17 Ibid., 80. Tilly also lists forms of organization like special-purpose associations under the term "social movement repertoire." (Tilly, *Social Movements*, 3.)

secular movement that threatened the foundations of Christian society. Even though the most famous materialists had only little contact with each other and disagreed on several issues, anti-materialist publications from the 1850s onwards made it seem like Vogt, Moleschott, and Büchner operated in close cooperation as the leaders of a new movement. The constant imagination and representation of materialism as an organized movement covered up the actual absence of unity among the materialists and contributed to the prominence of materialism in public debates concerning the relationship between secularism and modernity.

Vogt, Moleschott, and Büchner publicly criticized supernatural belief as well as the Christian churches' position of power. They contrasted this situation with their own ideas of an immanent explanation of the world and a secular society free from superstition and repression. In this sense they can be called freethinkers, even though the term did not play a prominent role in the debates over materialism in the 1850s.[18] The materialists self-identified first and foremost as scientists and not as freethinkers or secular activists. But the public role they played was certainly that of aggressive advocates of freethought and secularism. In the following, I will first analyze some of the core aspects of the materialist worldview and discuss how they tied in with ideas of a secular modernity. I will then argue that materialism did not possess most of the characteristics of an actual movement and will contrast this with academic, clerical, and political perceptions of materialism in the reactionary 1850s.

The Worldview of Scientific Materialism

In order to understand why so many contemporaries feared a materialist movement and its secular character in the 1850s, we first have to consider the idea content of scientific materialism and its historical context. Vogt, Moleschott, and Büchner not only criticized the truth claims of Christianity but also propagated political ideas that differed from the realities of nineteenth-century alliances of worldly and clerical authorities. Nineteenth-century secularism – to follow Todd Weir's definition – was shaped by the three central elements of "immanent worldview, practical ethics, and anticlericalism."[19] The materialists propagated all those elements: whereas anticlericalism was an outward expres-

18 I use the term "freethinker" to describe people who actively promoted a secular worldview in contrast to "traditional" notions of faith and religiosity in the nineteenth century.
19 Weir, *Secularism*, 4.

sion of their opinions, they saw their worldview and ethics as resulting directly from scientific insight. Furthermore, the materialists were proponents of what John Hedley Brooke has called "secularization of science" and "secularization by science": They hoped for the disappearance of any remaining references to the supernatural in the sciences and were, at the same time, convinced that such a secularized explanation of the world would lead to the inevitable secularization of society.[20] The materialists' concept of secularity was all-encompassing: they did not hope for a more clear-cut "distinction between religious and non-religious spheres,"[21] but for a complete replacement of Christianity by a new, science-based worldview. Their goal was not differentiation, but substitution.

In 1848, the revolutionary upheavals across Europe also spread to Germany, calling for constitutional reforms and a unified German nation state. However, the revolution soon fell apart and gave way to a reactionary period after 1849. Several German scientists had become politically active during the years of unrest and many saw science as a means toward political and social progress.[22] This politically charged image of the natural sciences persisted even after the revolution had ended. For many former revolutionaries science was a tool to perpetuate a progressive outlook in times of its official repression. Within this group, only a small number tended toward scientific materialism, most notably Vogt, Moleschott, and Büchner who all took on radical stances: to them, the study of nature seemed to prove that neither a personal God nor any other deity existed. Science would not only guarantee socio-political progress but also liberation from superstition and clerical oppression. To be clear, scientific materialism and secularism was not the same thing in the middle of the century: secularism was a broader phenomenon with different strands and ideas about the relationship of religion, society, and modernity. The materialists stood out among secularists because of their explicit atheism, whereas, for example, proponents of "free reli-

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20 John Hedley Brooke, "Science and Secularization," in *The Cambridge Companion to Science and Religion*, ed. Peter Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 108 – 109. I take secularization here as the – real or imagined, abhorred or hoped for – process of changing or even declining religious influence and significance in modern societies and states. For a summarizing assessment of secularization theories, see Detlef Pollack, "Säkularisierungstheorie, Version: 1.0," Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte, last modified March 7, 2013, http://docupedia.de/zg/Saekularisierungstheorie.

21 Marian Burchardt and Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, "Multiple Secularities: Religion and Modernity in the Global Age," *International Sociology* 28, no. 6 (11/2013): 606.

22 See Bayertz, "Spreading the Spirit," 218.

gion," one of the major secular movements of the time, tended more toward reconciling Christianity and modernity.[23]

But even the scientific materialists themselves did not exhibit an overall ideological coherence. While they all shared a progressive outlook, they did not adhere to the same political convictions. As a delegate of the democratic left, Vogt had actively participated in the revolution. Afterwards, inspired by such thinkers as Mikhail Alexandrovich Bakunin, he turned to anarchism for some time. Moleschott sympathized with socialism, albeit in a very vague fashion. In fact, he leaned more toward reforms and moderate positions. Büchner, as a student, had supported the revolution. Later he became involved with the emerging labor movement. But he, too, advocated reforms over revolution.[24] If not concrete policy, what then formed the core of the materialist worldview?

All three materialists shared a positivistic outlook: they believed that, based on scientific, especially physiological insights, the future would be grounded in science, no longer in any form of faith-based religion. For the time being, the widespread belief in the supernatural only seemed to distract the people from science's transformative potential. The influence of the Christian churches seemed to threaten any progress. Thus anticlerical disdain was ever-present in their writings.[25] Generally, the materialists were heavily influenced by the philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach and his critique of religion that identified God as a man-made projection.[26] But while paying respect to Feuerbach, they constantly presented their atheism as the outcome of scientific insight into the laws of nature and not as sheer philosophical reasoning. Whereas they saw religion and philosophy to be almost exclusively speculative, science – with all its calculating, measuring, microscopical, and laboratory work – seemed to provide the facts vital for a secular worldview that – to them – appeared appropriate for the modern world.

Using a distinction made by Todd Weir, one might call the materialists' denial of the supernatural and their critique of clerical power the negative work of their worldview. On the other hand, their popularization of natural science as the

23 See Weir, *Secularism*.

24 See Gregory, *Materialism*, 189 – 212; and Laura Meneghello, *Jacob Moleschott – A Transnational Biography: Science, Politics, and Popularization in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2017), 67.

25 Vogt, for example, described clerics as roaches and locusts: Vogt, *Untersuchungen*, 119 – 160.

26 Moleschott, for instance, wrote that "man creates everything in his image, [...] [even] the God he prays to." See Moleschott, *Kreislauf*, 362.

basis for socio-political progress might be called their positive work.[27] In their writings, science – in contrast to the Christian denominations – appeared as the only pathway to solving pressing social crises, especially the widespread pauperism. Mankind, they propagated, could learn how to use the laws of nature to its advantage. Büchner praised the sciences' potential for improving everyone's living conditions.[28] Vogt saw the "Herstellung des möglichst großen [...] Glücks für Alle" ("creation of as much [...] joy for everyone as possible") as one of the central tasks of a scientific worldview.[29] And Moleschott stipulated that scientists should disseminate "vernünftige Lebensregeln" ("reasonable maxims") – scientifically backed rules for a better life.[30]

The people could use science to improve their lives and thereby emancipate themselves. According to the materialists, brain activity was determined by matter. Moleschott, for example, coined the catchphrase "Ohne Phosphor kein Gedanke" ("No thought without phosphorus") to indicate the material basis of thought.[31] Therefore, materialists paid special attention to the human metabolism, assuming that if one knew how to influence the material composition of the organism, one could potentially alter its physical and mental strength. To this aim it seemed crucial to spread nutritional knowledge. Moleschott emphasized the importance of metabolic processes by reasoning that the "Gluth des Herzens" ("fervor of the heart") and the "Regsamkeit des Hirns" ("activity of the brain") of humans and animals were essentially determined by nutrients.[32] Vogt stated "that all brain functions are essentially modified by and dependent on the nourishment of the organ".[33] Büchner wrote that "a normally formed and nourished brain" would always be able to think properly.[34] While the formation of one's brain was a physical fact, theoretically everyone could arrange for the appropriate nourishment. Moleschott even published a guidebook on nutrition, particularly addressing the poor. In this book he presented food recommendations for different age groups, sexes, and professional categories – hoping

27 See the distinction between negative and positive work within secularism: Weir, *Secularism*, 70; 84.
28 Büchner, *Kraft*, 26.
29 Vogt, *Köhlerglaube*, 123.
30 Moleschott, *Lehre*, 246.
31 Ibid., 116.
32 Ibid., 1.
33 Vogt, *Köhlerglaube*, 121.
34 Büchner, *Kraft*, 191–192.

these would enable the poor to gain enough physical and mental strength to live a self-determined, free life.[35]

The message was ambiguous and showed traces of scientific governmentality: on the one hand, the people should be empowered to improve their lives; on the other hand, scientists and politicians were given the task to make use of nutritional physiology in order to transform society according to the paradigms of reason, progress, and modernity. From a socio-political standpoint, Moleschott argued that industrial workers had a natural right to demand well-balanced nutrition from their employers. Then again, he directly advised employers to supply their workers with rich nutrition in order to optimize their work performance.[36] Thus the emancipation of the poor could, at the same time, mean an optimization of their economic performance and therefore be beneficial to the state. This ambiguity is mirrored in the writings of Vogt who suspected that one could "through an appropriate arrangement of nutrition (once we know the premises), deliberately build statesmen, bureaucrats, theologians, revolutionaries, aristocrats, socialists."[37] And Büchner emphasized that science would allow mankind "to understand the laws of matter and thereby rule over them."[38] Science would not only benefit the individual, but also enable a well-functioning, optimized society. With their secular program focusing on the usefulness of science, the materialists participated in the discourse around the modern nation state and its attitude and efforts toward healthy, productive, and improved citizens.[39]

Scientific materialism had various admirers in the second half of the century. The distinguished zoologist Anton Dohrn, for example, later admitted that as a young student he had become a fervent materialist after reading Vogt's books.[40] In 1858, the philosopher Johann Christoph Fischer dedicated a book on free will, in which he further popularized the materialist position, to Moleschott whom he

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35 Moleschott, *Lehre*. For Moleschott's approach to nutrition, see Harmke Kamminga, "Nutrition for the People, or the Fate of Jacob Moleschott's Contest for a Humanist Science," in *The Science and Culture of Nutrition, 1840 – 1940*, ed. Harmke Kamminga and Andrew Cunningham (Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, 1995).

36 Moleschott, *Kreislauf*, 454.

37 Vogt, *Untersuchungen*, 25. Vogt does not specify the potential functions and roles in society for any of these groups. The reference to theologians might – like in many of Vogt's writings – be tongue-in-cheek.

38 Büchner, *Kraft*, 112.

39 For the relationship between nationalism, modernism, and progress, see Daniele Conversi, "Modernism and Nationalism," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 17, no. 1 (2012): 13 – 34.

40 Dohrn to F. A. Lange, Bahrendorf, August 30, 1866, reprinted in Georg Eckert, ed. *Friedrich Albert Lange: Über Politik und Philosphie, Briefe und Leitartikel 1862 bis 1875* (Duisburg: Walter Braun, 1968), 206.

called a "courageous warrior for the consequences of scientific facts."[41] Yet it was Büchner's *Kraft und Stoff* (Force and Matter, 1855) that received the most attention, albeit positive *and* negative. During his lifetime, the book ran through nineteen editions and was translated into sixteen languages. Autobiographical notes from various people show that they had read Büchner's work with interest. Among those were, for example, the Austrian suffragette Marianne Hainisch and even the young Albert Einstein.[42] Later in the century, the ideas of scientific materialism were widely debated among bourgeois as well as socialist freethought circles.[43] Starting in the 1850s, scientific materialism became crucial in propagating an aggressive combination of secularism and scientific arguments. However, by no means did this branch of secularism become an actual, organized mass movement in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Deconstructing the "Materialist Movement"

Toward the end of his life, Büchner reflected on his relationship with Moleschott. He admitted that the latter's writings largely influenced his own ideas. However, as he noted, he had "never known Moleschott personally." Speaking of himself in third person, Büchner concluded:

> It has always astonished him that he was so often portrayed as a member of a secret trinity with Moleschott and Karl Vogt which supposedly made it its goal to push the world into the abyss of materialist unbelief. Between the three of us there was never anything but an intellectual community.[44]

Büchner recognized a common misconception: other than generally assumed, the spokesmen of scientific materialism had very little personal contact with each other. As historian Christoph Kockerbeck has shown, they only exchanged a handful of letters in which they primarily discussed scientific matters but rare-

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41 Johann Christoph Fischer, *Ueber die Freiheit des menschlichen Willens* (Leipzig: Otto Wigand, 1858). The dedication has no page numbers.
42 Lilly Klaudy, "Marianne Hainisch erzählt aus ihrem Leben," *Neue Freie Presse: Morgenblatt*, March 20, 1930, 5; Max Talmey, *The Relativity Theory Simplified and the Formative Period of its Inventor* (New York: Falcon Press, 1932), 162–163.
43 See Frank Simon-Ritz, *Die Organisation einer Weltanschauung: Die freigeistige Bewegung im Wilhelminischen Deutschland* (Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1997).
44 Ludwig Büchner, "Jacob Moleschott (1894)," in *Im Dienste der Wahrheit: Ausgewählte Aufsätze aus Natur und Wissenschaft*, ed. Ludwig Büchner (Gießen: Emil Roth, 1900), 140.

ly questions of worldview or religion.[45] While they quoted each other in their books, their correspondence does not indicate any specific form of group identity or interest in creating more formal bonds to push forward a joint enterprise based on their shared secular conviction.

Nevertheless, already starting in the 1850s, Vogt, Moleschott, and Büchner were perceived in close personal proximity to each other, even by people who sympathized with them. In 1855, a German publisher asked Moleschott if he would be willing to translate a book by the British physician Thomas Lindley Kemp into German. In case Moleschott lacked time or interest to carry out this task, the publisher asked Moleschott if Vogt would be willing to translate the book.[46] Apparently, to some it seemed like Moleschott and Vogt were close enough to know about each other's work schedule and willingness to translate books. After Büchner released his scandalous *Kraft und Stoff*, he quickly became part of this perceived relationship. As early as December 1855, a friend of Moleschott expressed his discontent regarding the constant association of Moleschott with Vogt and Büchner.[47]

A movement led by Vogt, Moleschott, and Büchner seems also unlikely in regards to their spatial distance. The last time all three resided in Germany at the same time was in 1849. Vogt, due to his active involvement in the revolution, fled to Switzerland where, in 1852, he became professor of geology in Geneva. The fates of Moleschott and Büchner attest to the influence clerical authority and religious sentiments still had on the German educational system in the middle of the century. Denying the existence of God and criticizing Christianity was not just a religious but also a political matter. Moleschott's and Büchner's critique of religion was seen as an attack on the religious foundations of state and society. Their materialism, therefore, equaled political subversion and authorities would not tolerate such ideas in the highest educational institutions. Two years after the 1852 publication of his *Kreislauf des Lebens* (The Circle of Life), the senate of the University of Heidelberg officially reprimanded Moleschott for his materialist teachings. He immediately resigned from his post as *Privatdozent*, arguing that he could not work in such a repressive environment. In 1856, he moved to Zurich, Switzerland, where he became professor of physiology,

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45 Christoph Kockerbeck, "Einleitung des Herausgebers," in *Carl Vogt, Jacob Moleschott, Ludwig Büchner, Ernst Haeckel: Briefwechsel*, ed. Christoph Kockerbeck (Marburg: Basilisken Presse, 1999), 14–16.

46 Findel to Moleschott, Braunschweig, August 8, 1855, BCABo, FSM, Busta 11, fs. 17.

47 Gustav Buek to Moleschott, Hamburg, December 15, ibid., Busta 7, fs. 43.

and finally – in 1861 – took residence in Italy working as a professor and later on also as a politician.[48]

No other than Moleschott, Büchner suffered consequences because of his teachings. When he published *Kraft und Stoff*, he worked as a *Privatdozent* at the medical faculty of the University of Tübingen. The book immediately aroused the concern of university officials and politicians who feared that Büchner might preach materialism to his students. Even though he denied these allegations, suspicion persisted.[49] In August 1855, the King of Württemberg ordered that Büchner's teaching license was to be revoked. He lost his university position, and subsequently returned to this hometown of Darmstadt where he started working as a medical practitioner.

Apart from these biographical parallels and the shared, yet not identical convictions, one episode stands out in which materialism almost adopted the character of an organized effort. In the second half of 1856, a few Hamburg-based publishers and political activists founded a new journal, *Das Jahrhundert*, which, to a certain degree, was launched to promote scientific materialism. But, as I will show, this journal did not manage to establish a solid materialist group identity – which further underlines the fragility of scientific materialism as a secular ideology.

Das Jahrhundert was short-lived. Following a series of repressive political measures, it had to cease publication in June 1859 after less than three years of existence. It is worth noting that neither Vogt nor Moleschott nor Büchner were involved in the journal's formation and it was only Büchner who contributed some articles. Yet all three served as a central point of reference in many articles. In the 1850s, overtly democratic political action – let alone open debates on socialism – were widely suppressed. Within the German territories, Hamburg had a relatively high standard of press freedom. Thus the journal's editors were able to publish several explicitly political articles and scientific papers with political leanings.[50] In a letter dating January 1857, one of the editors, Friedrich Au-

48 See Meneghello, *Moleschott*.

49 Klaus Schreiner, "Der Fall Büchner: Studien zur Geschichte der akademischen Lehrfreiheit an der Universität Tübingen im 19. Jahrhundert," in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Universität Tübingen 1477–1977*, ed. Hansmartin Decker-Hauff, Gerhard Fichtner and Klaus Schreiner (Tübingen: Attempto, 1977).

50 Themes ranged from science-oriented articles such as "Naturwissenschaften und Gesellschaftslehre" ("Natural Sciences and Social Studies") and "Physische Beschaffenheit und Geschichte der Weltkörper" ("Physical Nature and History of Celestial Bodies") to explicitly political ones such as "Der Kapitalismus und seine Kritik" ("Capitalism and its Critique") and "Soll die Demokratie den Kampf mit dem Pfaffenthum vermeiden?" ("Should Democracy Avoid the Struggle with Priesthood?").

gust Reckahn, explained the journal's highly ideological mission to one of its contributors: *Das Jahrhundert* was to work in favor of the "social-democratic party and [...] in the interest of the materialist worldview, or, if you like, natural science."[51] This statement documents not only Reckahn's conviction that science and materialism meant the same, but also that there was a link between science and left-leaning political ideologies. In another letter, Reckahn characterized the editors as "Materialisten aus Überzeugung" ("convinced materialists") who believed that scientific materialism was the most suitable basis for the "intellectual development of humanity."[52]

However, from the very beginning, quarrels arose among editors and authors concerning questions of politics and worldview. To some contributors, the high value ascribed to materialism seemed dubious. Thus, in the January 1857 volume, the philosopher and former revolutionary Arnold Ruge, one of the journal's authors, criticized scientific materialism. Without reference to specific persons, he made it clear that his critique was directed against the materialists. Ruge mocked the "naive friends," mostly geologists and physiologists, who wanted to abolish philosophy and therefore tried to spare the people from thinking for themselves. He continued to lament the "eternal truth of the natural sciences."[53] Ruge noted that "the true fatherland of the Germans, thinking and poetry, is in danger."[54] Due to these remarks, Ruge was temporarily removed from the group of authors for *Das Jahrhundert*. However, this episode indicates that some contributors shared the journal's democratic political goals without adhering to its accompanying materialist worldview.

Other cases of disagreement involved contributors of the journal blaming each other for not being materialistic enough. The author Mathilde Reichardt, for example, speculated that the materialist philosopher Heinrich Czolbe might in fact not be a "consequential materialist," even though she admitted not having read his books.[55] She also accused Otto Ule, another contributor, who had criticized her on a previous occasion, of damaging the materialist

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51 Reckahn to Moses Hess, Hamburg, January 10, 1857, printed in *Moses Hess: Briefwechsel*, ed. Edmund Silberner (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1959), 320.

52 Reckahn to Moses Hess, Hamburg, January 28, 1857, printed in ibid., 322.

53 Arnold Ruge, "Der Geist unserer Zeit; zum Neujahrsgruß," *Das Jahrhundert: Zeitschrift für Politik und Literatur* 2, no. 1 (1857): 16.

54 Ibid., 13.

55 Mathilde Reichardt, "Der Kampf um die Seele, von Rudolph Wagner (Göttingen, Verlag der Dieterich'schen Buchhandlung)," *Das Jahrhundert: Zeitschrift für Politik und Literatur* 3, no. 1 (1858): 63.

worldview with his critique.[56] Reichardt insisted that she did not even think of Ule as a materialist.[57]

Finally, *Das Jahrhundert* lacked input from Vogt and Moleschott. In October 1857, Reckahn told Moses Hess, one of the journal's prominent authors, that both Vogt and Moleschott had agreed to publish articles in the January 1858 volume.[58] However, for the remaining time of its existence, none of them contributed a single paper to the organ. The last volume was published in June 1859. It contained an anonymously written article on the journal's history. The author's disappointment became obvious in his critical remarks on the journal's previous focus on materialism and the natural sciences. Scientific progress and materialism, the contributor implied, had not furthered democracy in Germany. The sciences, taken as materialism, had strongly underestimated the complexity of the modern world which could not solely be explained on the basis of natural laws and sheer necessity.[59] Reflecting on the materialist stance on determinism and the negation of free will, the author criticized: "Was all the scientific enrichment [...] just a way to remove the term freedom from this world? Then we do in fact deserve all the slavery in which we were cast for so long!"[60]

This indicates again that secularism and radical politics did not necessarily overlap with scientific materialism. Nineteenth-century secularism exhibited a multitude of heterogeneous ideas. This heterogeneity manifested itself in *Das Jahrhundert*, where materialism, in the end, was a source of disappointment. The journal remained the only serious attempt to institutionalize scientific materialism in the 1850s. Vogt, Moleschott, and Büchner had their supporters mostly among politically radical and scientifically interested, yet untrained individuals. But as the case of *Das Jahrhundert* shows, materialism remained too disputed to become the basis for any collective secularist attempt targeting political or social influence. Even among the journal's authors the details of secularism as an ideology remained unclear. Nevertheless, despite its lack of cohesiveness, many contemporaries, especially more conservative ones, saw and presented scientific materialism as a growing movement that increasingly gained influence on the intellectual and political climate of Germany.

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56 Mathilde Reichardt, "Die Kritik als Verläumderin: Mathilde Reichardt an Otto Ule," *Das Jahrhundert: Zeitschrift für Politik und Literatur* 3, no. 1 (1858): 335.
57 Ibid., 317.
58 Reckahn to Hess, Hamburg, October 29, 1857, printed in *Hess: Briefwechsel*, 342.
59 "Geschichte des 'Jahrhunderts': Erbauliches und Beschauliches," *Das Jahrhundert: Zeitschrift für Politik und Literatur* 4 (1859): 419.
60 Ibid.

The Perception of Materialism as a Movement

Advocating secularism and declaring in favor of atheism, in the 1850s, were clearly political positions. To doubt Christianity implied questioning the foundations of the state and of the monarchs who continued to legitimize their rule religiously. Besides, the materialists explicitly demanded the secularization not only of science, but also of society and politics and, in their writings, made it no secret that their political sympathies lay with democracy and other left-leaning ideologies. Scientific materialism in the 1850s, therefore, was per se political and, consequently, was perceived this way by contemporaries. Theologians, philosophers, but also scientists, answered materialism – whether as part of a conscious strategy or their actual perception – in building up a hostile image of an organized, coherent enemy of growing importance.

To them, Germany's university students seemed to form the basis of this supposed mass movement. The universities were presented as a hotbed of materialism. In the eyes of politically conservative, devout Christian authors the appeal of materialism to the academic youth posed a great threat to society as a whole. They were afraid that if the future elite was to be further indoctrinated by materialism, this would open the doors to immorality and unrest. The anti-materialist philosopher Karl Fischer, who, already in 1853, published a book against Vogt and Moleschott, stated that he felt he had to take action because of his "Liebe zu strebenden Jünglingen" ("love for the striving youth").[61] An anonymous author argued in a similar direction, bemoaning, the materialists would abuse the innocent natural sciences in order to bring about "Verderben der unerfahrnen Jugend oder der ungebildeten Menge" ("corruption of the inexperienced youth and the uneducated masses").[62] In 1856, the Protestant theologian Friedrich Fabri intervened, complaining that there are "countless people who are indoctrinated by materialism in the lecture halls blindly believing what they are being told".[63] Some time later, the theologian and natural scientist August Böhner released a harsh critique of materialism. He felt such a critical volume was missing as it would summarize the countless publications for and against materialism and offer guidance especially for students. By reading his book,

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61 Karl Fischer, *Die Unwahrheit des Sensualismus und Materialismus mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Schriften von Feuerbach, Vogt und Moleschott* (Erlangen: Theodor Bläsing, 1853), 52.
62 *Dr. Büchner's Kraft und Stoff oder die Kunst Gold zu machen aus Nichts: Auch ein Zeichen unserer Zeit; beleuchtet und gewürdigt von einem Freunde der Naturwissenschaft und Wahrheit* (Darmstadt: Gustav Georg Lange, 1856), 23.
63 Friedrich Fabri, *Briefe gegen den Materialismus* (Stuttgart: S. G. Liesching, 1856), X.

Böhner hoped, readers would realize how "the most recent results of the natural sciences prove the basic truths of [...] Christianity."[64]

Others directly referred to the alleged growth of the movement. While the Catholic theologian Jakob Frohschammer noticed that Vogt had "already gained a considerable number of disciples and coworkers,"[65] the philosopher Adolf Helfferich agreed that Vogt had "a vast number of fellow believers."[66] And Friedrich Euen, a Protestant pastor in Pomerania, called scientific materialism the "ruler of our days." It seemed so widespread that he characterized it as the "im Wachsthum begriffene Herrschaft eines Usurpators" ("expanding rule of an usurper").[67] Many of these authors did not just present materialism as a growing movement, but also accused Vogt, Moleschott, and Büchner of consciously working toward expansion and therefore toward social and political power. August Weber, for example, district medical officer in the German state of Hesse, insinuated the materialists would actively recruit followers.[68] And another author warned: "The propaganda of materialism seeks to influence the masses in order to release man from divine law and to remodel the existing social order according to the materialist dogma."[69]

Vogt's, Moleschott's, and Büchner's contemporaries explicitly thought of them as an organized, cooperating trinity. Again and again their names were invoked together, making it seem like they were a group. The Protestant pastor Friedrich Fabri contemptuously spoke of "Vogt, Moleschott, Büchner, and whatever their names may be" and decried them as "die Koryphäen und Ritter von der Materie" ("luminaries and knights of matter").[70] Another publication suggested that Vogt was the "most influential representative" of materialism, who

64 August Nathanael Böhner, *Naturforschung und Kulturleben in ihren neuesten Ergebnissen zur Beleuchtung der grossen Frage der Gegenwart über Christenthum und Materialismus, Geist und Stoff* (Hannover: Carl Rümpler, 1859), VIII–IX.

65 Jakob Frohschammer, *Menschenseele und Physiologie: Eine Streitschrift gegen Professor Carl Vogt in Genf* (Munich: Literarisch-artistische Anstalt, 1855), 93.

66 Adolf Helfferich, *Die neuere Naturwissenschaft, ihre Ergebnisse und ihre Aussichten* (Trieste: Literarisch-artist. Abtheilung des österr. Lloyd, 1857), 42.

67 Friedrich Euen, *Der naturwissenschaftliche Materialismus in seinem Princip und in seinen Konsequenzen: Ein Vortrag, auf der Veranstaltung des Evangelischen Vereins für kirchliche Zwecke gehalten am 3. März 1856* (Berlin: Wilhelm Schultze, 1856), 3.

68 August Weber, *Die neueste Vergötterung des Stoffs: Ein Blick in das Leben der Natur und des Geistes, für denkende Leser* (Gießen: Emil Roth, 1856), 229.

69 Böhner, *Naturforschung*, VIII.

70 Fabri, *Briefe*, 8.

was joined by Moleschott and most recently also by Büchner.[71] In a more moderate tone the philosopher Jürgen Bona Meyer referred to them as "that triumvirate."[72] And a Swiss theological journal denounced "these materialist noisemakers […] à la Vogt, Büchner, Moleschott et Comp. [and we know that this company is very large and expanded and also reaches for Switzerland]."[73] The constant mentioning of all three names evoked the impression of an inseparable group. One could even instrumentalize the chain *Vogt-Moleschott-Büchner* to attack others as alleged materialists. In Vienna, the Catholic agitator Sebastian Brunner denounced the Botanist Franz Unger as "the Austrian Vogt-Büchner-Moleschott."[74] According to Brunner, Unger was teaching his students a materialist worldview. It did not matter that Unger, in fact, was no materialist at all.[75] Brunner still could evoke their names and teachings to discredit a disliked contemporary.

Historian Christoph Kockerbeck was right to doubt the perception of Vogt, Moleschott, and Büchner as a "materialist triumvirate."[76] However, Kockerbeck traces back this "triadic identification" first and foremost to the Marxist critique of scientific materialism.[77] While it is true that Marx and Engels were critical of Vogt, Moleschott, and Büchner and also identified them as belonging together, this perspective misses an important point. Apart from the Marxist critique, the scientific materialists were attacked by numerous philosophers, theologians, and scientists who rejected the atheism and secularism of materialism. Here, Vogt, Moleschott, and Büchner were stylized as a triumvirate leading an organized mass movement that furthered atheism and radical politics. While the materialists' books sold well, the intensive reception by their critics added to their prominent role within debates over secularism in the middle of the century. The topic became so controversial that, as the case of Sebastian Brunner shows, one could attack people suspected of political radicalism or religious deviance as being adherents of scientific materialism. The identification of materialism as

71 Friedrich von Thiersch, "Rede über die Grenzscheide der Wissenschaften, zur Feier des Allerhöchsten Geburtsfestes Sr. Majestät des König Maximilian II. von Bayern (Fortsetzung)," *Gelehrte Anzeigen der k. bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, December 27, 1855, 191.

72 Jürgen Bona Meyer, *Zum Streit über Leib und Seele: Worte der Kritik, Sechs Vorlesungen, am Hamburger akademischen Gymnasium gehalten* (Hamburg: Perthes-Besser & Mauke, 1856), 36.

73 "Gläubige und ungläubige Naturforscher," *Schweizerische Kirchenzeitung*, April 19, 1856, 136.

74 Sebastian Brunner, "Der österreichische Vogt-Büchner-Moleschott," *Wiener Kirchenzeitung*, January 4, 1856, 9–10.

75 See Sander Gliboff, "Evolution, Revolution, and Reform in Vienna: Franz Unger's Ideas on Descent and their Post-1848 Reception," *Journal of the History of Biology* 31 (1998): 205.

76 Kockerbeck, "Einleitung," 14.

77 Ibid., 15.

a movement also caught the attention of political authorities. In a relatively short time span in the 1850s, scientific materialism became a problem that they could no longer ignore. The combination of anticlericalism, secularism, and radical politics – all under the banner of the natural sciences – contradicted everything the post-revolutionary rulers represented. The many critics of materialism were therefore successful in establishing the image of a dangerous, growing secular movement. In effect, materialism was not just the topic of an academic conflict, but rapidly became a political one, too.

Another episode shall illustrate the lasting and politically charged perception of materialism as a secular mass movement led by a triumvirate. In late 1865, Paul Haffner, a high-ranking Catholic priest in the Rhenish city of Mainz, published *Der Materialismus in der Culturgeschichte* (Cultural History of Materialism). According to Haffner, scientific materialism continued to be a dangerous, widespread ideology. He reported that "about a year ago a banquet of 600 workers in Frankfurt/Main ceremonially declared the idea of God and immortality as a form of slavery that had to be relinquished – and extended the gratitude of the people to men like Vogt, Büchner, and Moleschott as their liberators."[78] Haffner added, in a cautionary tone, that there were thousands of supporters behind those 600 workers. He even implied that materialism might initiate a return to the "catastrophe of the French Revolution."[79] His account points to the persistence of the heated debates and perceptions following the Revolutions of 1848–49. If the scientific materialist movement with its many thousands of members would prevail, Haffner assured his readers, the outcome would be nothing short of a catastrophe.

Surveillance and Oppression

For the people associated with materialism, these pejorative and insinuating characterizations soon led to real consequences. Ecclesiastical and worldly authorities increasingly grew suspicious of the alleged dangers of materialism. Hence, the German Evangelical Church Conference of 1856 debated "how the Church should deal with the influence of the new scientific materialism on

78 Paul Haffner, *Der Materialismus in der Culturgeschichte* (Mainz: Franz Kirchheim, 1865), 369–370.
79 Ibid., 370.

the people."[80] One Catholic commentator lauded these Protestants debates on how to counter materialism, noting that this question was "nichts spezifisch Confessionelles" ("nothing specifically denominational"). Catholics and Protestants had "a common enemy of the Christians, because he is an enemy of Christ".[81]

State authorities shared those fears: not only did they remove the materialists from university positions, but also prosecuted the perceived connection between the three and the movement they seemed to lead. While the University of Tübingen and the responsible ministry of the Kingdom of Württemberg negotiated whether Büchner should be deprived of his teaching license, they compared his positions to those of Vogt and Moleschott. One of the ministers even turned directly to the king and presented Büchner's *Kraft und Stoff* as part of a homogeneous concept shared by the other two materialists.[82] As already noted, Büchner lost his position in Tübingen and retreated from an academic career in the end.

Political consequences were not just restricted to regional affairs. Even though Germany was not yet unified, the states of the German Confederation already cooperated on various issues. Police and surveillance institutions were among the first to operate on transregional levels after 1848, falling back to a certain extent to former networks, including Austria. The Police Association of the Major German States became a repressive, assertive secret police.[83] As there were no materialist organizations and Vogt and Moleschott did not even reside in Germany anymore, the police took action against their publications. Several of them were banned from distribution while police reports from the 1850s listed materialism among the "anti-government parties."[84] One report of 1858 reads: "By supporting people like Vogt, Moleschott, Büchner, who only seek doom and destruction, Switzerland contributes to the spread of revolution-

80 August von Bethmann-Hollweg, Friedrich Julius Stahl and Heinrich von Mühler, "Einladung zum Kirchentage in Lübeck 1856," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für christliche Wissenschaft und christliches Leben* 7 (1856): 183.
81 Dr. Haas, "Ein Beitrag zur Kritik des Materialismus," *Sion: Eine Stimme in der Kirche für unsere Zeit*, November 4, 1856, 1061.
82 Schreiner, "Fall," 325 – 328.
83 Wolfram Siemann, "Einleitung," in *Der "Polizeiverein" deutscher Staaten: Eine Dokumentation zur Überwachung der Öffentlichkeit nach der Revolution von 1848/49*, ed. Wolfram Siemann (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1983), 2.
84 See Meyer, *Streit*, 10. See also "Regierungsfeindliche Parteien" (1858), printed in Siemann, *"Polizeiverein,"* 148 – 156.

ary ideas in literature [...]. It is Switzerland's prime credit that it nourishes and fosters materialism."[85]

Despite the fact that in 1858 only Vogt and Moleschott resided in Switzerland, the idea of a close-knit materialist group seemed to be so alluring that even the secret police saw Vogt, Moleschott, and Büchner – or at least their ideas – as operating together there. Scientific materialism, as perceived by the secret police, was trying to overthrow the existing social and political order. It was thus presented as one branch of "anti-government" circles – alongside, for example, socialist and Marxist groups. The report even listed "assassinations of heads of states" as one possible result of materialist propaganda.[86] The police assumed a "party" of materialism,[87] "mainly connected to the names Vogt, Moleschott, Büchner." This party was seen as supporting the revolution through its propaganda. The report states that not only would it be necessary to combat materialism "with intellectual weapons," but also deemed repressive police measures appropriate.[88]

There was no organized secular mass movement of materialists led by Vogt, Moleschott, and Büchner. However, all three materialists argued for a secularized version of science that in turn would secularize society as a whole. Their ideas, albeit often in a vague form, encompassed philosophical, ethical, and also political elements. Critics inherently perceived materialism in a political fashion. Many influential contemporaries and even state officials not only assumed, but also medially constructed an organized movement behind this set of ideas that was threatening the Christian foundations of state and society. So, was there an actual materialist movement in the 1850s? The answer is both yes and no. No, materialism never possessed many of the traits that usually define social movements. It was a movement that never materialized. But on the other hand, yes, a materialist movement did exist – at least in the perception of many of its contemporaries.

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85 "Protokoll der 13. Polizeikonferenz vom 14.–17.06.1858 in München," printed in *Dokumente aus geheimen Archiven*, vol. 5: *Die Polizeikonferenzen deutscher Staaten 1851–1866: Präliminardokumente, Protokolle und Anlagen*, ed. Friedrich Beck and Walter Schmidt (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1993), 326.
86 Ibid.
87 The term "party" does not necessarily indicate a political party. For the 1850s, it carries a much more informal meaning than today.
88 "Regierungsfeindliche Parteien" (1858), printed in Siemann, *"Polizeiverein,"* 155–156. Italics in the original.

Conclusion

Historian Christoph Kockerbeck stated that the reception of Vogt, Moleschott, and Büchner "was informed by exaggeration and distortion for a fairly long time."[89] We might even go further and find this exaggeration to be an immediate by-product of the appearance of the three scientists on the stage of German popular scientific literature. Following the publication of Büchner's *Force and Matter*, the three names seemed inseparable. Yet critics of materialism overstressed any existing connections of the materialists and insinuated they would pursue political goals by actively recruiting people, especially students, to amplify their movement. Contrary to these assumptions, scientific materialism never became an organized movement with the goal of spreading secularism. No materialist organizations, associations, and – apart from the short-lived *Das Jahrhundert* – also no journals existed that dedicated their causes exclusively to the teachings of Vogt, Moleschott, and Büchner. And not even the members of the *triumvirate* themselves identified as a group.

That is not to say that those widely read and often referenced materialists were not influential in regards to secularization in the nineteenth century. Already prior to Darwin's publication of the *Origin of Species* they fostered an image of science versus religion that would later become one of the defining narratives of modernity. To some extent they paved the way for others who followed them later in the century and attempted to substitute the Christian worldview by a secular one based on the natural sciences. Most notably, Ernst Haeckel's monist philosophy is often regarded as the heir of scientific materialism. According to historian Bernhard Kleeberg, Haeckel already toyed with the idea of establishing monism as an "anticlerical popular movement" during the 1870s, even though it took him much longer to formally launch monism on a broad basis.[90]

During those years the materialists did not disappear from public debate. Vogt, Moleschott, and Büchner remained controversial authors until the end of the century. In 1881, several freethinkers, atheists, and other activists founded the *Deutsche Freidenkerbund* (German Freethinker League), the first major German organization promoting freethought and atheism. Not surprisingly, Ludwig Büchner became the league's first president.[91] Moleschott died in 1893, Vogt in 1895, and Büchner in 1899. After the turn of the century, in 1906, Ernst Haeckel

89 Kockerbeck, "Einleitung," 14.

90 Bernhard Kleeberg, *Theophysis: Ernst Haeckels Philosophie des Naturganzen* (Cologne/Weimar/Vienna: Böhlau, 2005), 285.

91 See Simon-Ritz, *Die Organisation einer Weltanschauung*, 93.

officially founded the *Deutsche Monistenbund* (German Monist League) with the purpose of creating a strong secularist organization with a scientific worldview.[92] But it was not until very late in the nineteenth century that freethought and even atheism in Germany truly became mass movements.

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Katharina Neef

Politicizing a (Non)Religious Act: The Secularist Church Exit Propaganda of the *Komitee Konfessionslos* (1908 – 1914)

The late nineteenth century saw a rush of organized secularism. While in the past research tended to frame secularism as a by-product of modernization or an extreme case of secularization, more recent studies grasp secularist associations and their communicative forums as active players in society. Instead of reconstructing the reception and adaption of scientific and social discourses within these groups, the general research focus now is on the impact that these marginalized voices made on the public discourses of their times.

The German *Komitee Konfessionslos* (Committee Un-Denominational)[1] is one protagonist in this field. Established in 1911, it agitated passive church members (who did not participate in church services or biographical rituals anymore) to leave church and become "dissidents." With its propaganda, the Committee reached a broad audience. Moreover, its publications and mass events offered the scarce opportunity for an intense cooperation between protagonists of two antagonist political camps – bourgeois liberals and social democrats – to jointly advocate a certain agenda. Furthermore, the head of the Committee, Otto Lehmann-Rußbüldt (1873 – 1964),[2] managed to introduce his work as an eminent discursive support of the progressivist social reform milieu by popularizing and legitimizing classical anticlerical stereotypes.

Focusing on the *Komitee Konfessionslos*, its publications, and communicative strategies, this chapter first will refer to some historical contexts of church

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1 Horst Ermel, *Die Kirchenaustrittsbewegung im Deutschen Reich 1906 – 1914* (PhD diss., University of Cologne, 1971); Raoul R. Grossman, "Heraus aus der Kirche: German Social Democracy's Policies towards the Churches, 1865 – 1918" (MA thesis, University of Vancouver, 1976), accessed March 27, 2020, https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/831/items/1.0093775; Jochen-Christoph Kaiser, *Arbeiterbewegung und organisierte Religionskritik: Proletarische Freidenkerverbände in Kaiserreich und Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981); and Jochen-Christoph Kaiser, "Sozialdemokratie und 'praktische' Religionskritik: Das Beispiel der Kirchenaustrittsbewegung 1878 – 1914," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 22 (1982): 263 – 298.

2 See Wilhelm Gröf, "Lehmann-Rußbüldt, Otto," in *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 14 (1985), accessed March 27, 2020, https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd116873310.html; and Nicholas A. Furness, "Otto Lehmann-Rußbueldt: Forgotten Prophet of a Federal Europe," in *"England? Aber wo liegt es?" Deutsche und österreichische Emigranten in Großbritannien, 1933 – 1945*, ed. Charmian Brinson (Munich: Iuridicum, 1996), 87 – 98.

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membership and church exit in order to contextualize secularist aims, strategies, and narratives. Second, the Committee's work will be approached in two dimensions: its public impact and the agenda of its mastermind, Otto Lehmann-Rußbüldt. In a third step, the textual strategies framing church exit will be reconstructed and potential reasons for leaving church will be traced together with potential benefits – individually and socially – contemporaries might have connected to this act. With that in mind, the social dimension of leaving church is discussed: as will be shown, the mass events to agitate church exit reached and mobilized an immense audience, yet failed to actually implement the intended change. Still, the *Komitee Konfessionslos* proves an eminent force in shaping the late-Wilhelmine anticlerical discourse that has been identified as an important source of the constitutional debates of 1919.

One last aspect to be discussed are the surveys organized by the Committee, which counted church visitors and published the results as a means of criticizing religion. By this and with regard to emptying churches, its members questioned the civilizing effect of Sunday sermons and invoked a public debate in the German Empire on the (self)definition of being religious and of being a Christian nation. The strictly statistical-empiric approach not only copied scientific methods but – even more – was discussed as a scientific practice by the secularists who stressed the critical potential of science toward religion. Through its efforts, the Committee coined a pattern of a dialectic dissemination of theory and practice between academic circles and "worldview producing amateurs" among the social reformers.[3]

Historical Context: German Confessionalism, Dissidence, *Konfessionslosigkeit*

Anticlerical and freethought movements flourished prior to 1914, preceded by the scientific revolutions of the nineteenth century and by the formation of secular worldview organizations.[4] This development rooted most notably in the shift of

3 Horst Groschopp, *Dissidenten: Freidenkerei und Kultur in Deutschland* (Berlin: Dietz, 1997).
4 See Jörn Brederlow, *"Lichtfreunde" und "Freie Gemeinden": Religiöser Protest und Freiheitsbewegung im Vormärz und in der Revolution von 1848/49* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1976); Frank Simon-Ritz, *Die Organisation einer Weltanschauung: Die freigeistige Bewegung im Wilhelminischen Deutschland* (Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1996); Groschopp, *Dissidenten*; Rebekka Habermas, "Piety, Power, and Powerlessness: Religion and Religious Groups in Germany, 1870 – 1945," in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern German History*, ed. Helmut Walser Smith (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 453 – 480; Lisa Dittrich, *Antiklerikalismus in Europa: Öffentlichkeit und Sä-*

paradigms with natural sciences taking a lead in the public discourse and becoming the legitimate source of empirical knowledge.[5] Another reason causing these changes was the growing transnational interconnectedness of the participating actors: a broader discourse of social reform and social progressiveness formed, boosted by the legitimacy of famous and internationally renowned personalities within the spectrum of reform.[6]

A third aspect that has to be considered when it comes to the publicity of freethought in the Wilhelmine period are the continuous attempts to convince all non-active or non-believing church members to de-convert openly from the established Christian churches. This approach roots in the fact that almost all citizens of the German Empire were registered members of a religious community, most notably of the Roman Catholic Church or one of the established Protestant churches. Thus, a significant part of the personal, financial, and temporal

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kularisierung in Frankreich, Spanien und Deutschland (1848–1914) (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014); Todd Weir, *Secularism and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Germany: The Rise of the Fourth Confession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); and Lisa Dittrich, "European Connections, Obstacles, and the Search for a New Concept of Religion: The Freethought Movement as an Example of Transnational Anti-Catholicism in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Religious History* 39, no. 2 (2015): 261–279.

5 Olaf Breidbach, "Monismus um 1900 – Wissenschaftspraxis oder Weltanschauung?," in *Welträtsel und Lebenswunder: Ernst Haeckel – Werk, Wirkung und Folgen*, ed. Erna Aescht (Linz: Oberösterreichisches Landesmuseum, 1998), 289–316; Eve-Marie Engels, "Darwins Popularität im Deutschland des 19. Jahrhunderts: Die Herausbildung der Biologie als Leitwissenschaft," in *Menschenbilder: Zur Pluralisierung der Vorstellung von der menschlichen Natur (1850–1914)*, ed. Achim Barsch and Peter Hejl (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), 91–145; Rosemarie Nöthlich, Olaf Breidbach and Uwe Hoßfeld, "'Was ist Natur'? Einige Aspekte zur Wissenschaftspopularisierung in Deutschland," in *"Klassische Universität" und "akademische Provinz": Studien zur Universität Jena von der Mitte des 19. bis in die dreißiger Jahre des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Matthias Steinbach and Stefan Gerber (Jena/Quedlinburg: Bussert & Stadeler, 2005), 239–250; and Paul Ziche, *Wissenschaftslandschaften um 1900: Philosophie, die Wissenschaften und der nichtreduktive Szientismus* (Zurich: Chronos, 2008).

6 Details on this process offer Dittrich, *Antiklerikalismus in Europa*; Dittrich, "European Connections"; Christophe Verbruggen and Julie Carlier, "Laboratories of Social Thought: The Transnational Advocacy Network of the Institut International pour la Diffusion des Expériences Sociales and its Documents du Progrès (1907–1916)," in *Information beyond Borders: International Cultural and Intellectual Exchange in the Belle Époque*, ed. W. Boyd Rayward (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 123–142; Nico Randeraad, "Triggers of Mobility: International Congresses (1840–1914) and their Visitors," *Jahrbuch für Europäische Geschichte* 16 (2015): 63–82; and Nico Randeraad and Chris Leonards, "Building a Transnational Network of Social Reform in the Nineteenth Century," in *Shaping the Transnational Sphere: Experts, Networks and Issues from the 1840s to the 1930s*, ed. Davide Rodogno, Bernhard Struck and Jakob Vogel (New York/Oxford: Berghahn, 2015), 111–131.

resources of the numerous German freethought associations were used to proselytize in public speeches or debates, but also by agitating and polemic brochures aiming to win over new members. Public speeches and debates, in particular, turned out to be successful, yet at the same time quite elusive instruments to attract prospective members. Although it is true that public events were highly frequented, anticlericalism was widespread, and the secularization of daily habits was common (especially in the urban, Protestant regions of the German Empire),[7] the secularist associations continued to attract only a scarce membership:[8] The *Deutsche Freidenkerbund* (German Freethinker League, DFB), founded 1881 by Ludwig Büchner with a focus on materialism and a critique of religion, had 6,000 members (including 5,000 corporate members); the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Ethische Kultur* (German Society for Ethical Culture), founded in 1892 by Georg von Gizycki as the German branch of the Ethical Movement, had 850 members; and the *Deutsche Monistenbund* (German Monist League, DMB), founded in 1906 by Ernst Haeckel, had 6,000 members gathering around the idea of the scientific fundaments of a modern worldview. Furthermore, there were the communities of the *Deutsche Bund Freireligiöser Gemeinden* (Federation of Free Religious Parishes in Germany, DBFG), founded in 1844 by the pre-revolutionary *Deutschkatholiken* and the Protestant *Lichtfreunde*, that counted 50,000 members (including 18,000 paying members) in 1914. This broad membership of the DBFG owes to its familial structure and the religious community, devoted to non-dogmatic religious belief settings and a "rationalized" (that is, non-sacramental, social-centered) practice. While the former associations had mainly male members, free religion attracted couples and families, providing them with the regular services of a church community. Here, the social setting for the biographical rites of passage grew in importance. This dimension became crucial in the years 1890 to 1914 with the quarrels on preparatory education lessons leading to *Jugendweihe*, as the free religious parishes termed their alternative to the Christian confirmation.[9]

To sum up, the German public discourse was permeated by a widespread anticlerical momentum, but the main carriers of this attitude (anticlericals, free-

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7 Lucian Hölscher, *Datenatlas zur religiösen Geographie im protestantischen Deutschland: Von der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg*, 4 vols. (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2001).

8 For numbers, see Max Henning, ed., *Handbuch der freigeistigen Bewegungen Deutschlands, Österreichs und der Schweiz* (Frankfurt/Main: Neuer Frankfurter Verlag, ^{2}1914).

9 See Werner Lesanovsky, ed., *Den Menschen der Zukunft erziehen: Dokumente zur Bildungspolitik, Pädagogik und zum Schulkampf der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung 1870–1900* (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 2003).

thinkers, free religious, and social reformers of different provenience) were constantly failing to transform this stance into social forms and public agency. One strategy they applied was the attempt to mobilize the assumed critical stratum to initiate a church exit mass movement in the German Empire that would enforce secularism, i. e. the separation of church and state. This strategy was mainly pursued by the freethought magazine *Der Dissident* (The Dissident).[10] In April 1911, an anonymous author speculated that most citizens refrained from leaving church because they feared professional or social disadvantages. This seemed to call for a collective approach to prevent discrimination: "Wir sammeln Unterschriften von Personen, die sich verpflichten, aus der Kirche auszutreten, wenn innerhalb eines bestimmten Zeitraumes 100.000 oder 200.000 Unterschriften zusammenkommen." ("We collect signatures of those willing to leave church, if one or two hundred thousand others would join them.")[11] One year later, the same journal announced the founding of the *Komitee Konfessionslos* with the agenda to ignite a mass exodus from the established churches.[12]

Church Membership and *Konfessionslosigkeit*

Before considering the Committee's activities in detail, there are two more aspects to take into account: the status of church membership in the German Empire and its growing importance for the freethought discourse. Church membership had been autonomously administered by the religious communities until 1875, when the imperial state introduced compulsory communal civil registers throughout the country. Although the focus of the Bismarck administration was on centralized birth registers and the introduction of civil marriages, the registers also enlisted the religious affiliation of each citizen. The monopolization of the civil registries had been introduced as a measure of the (predominantly anti-Catholic) *Kulturkampf*,[13] but it weakened all established churches by diluting

10 On the journal, see the following.

11 Gr., "Ein Vorschlag zur Kirchenaustrittsbewegung," *Der Dissident* 5, no. 2 (May 1911): 16. The author could not be identified, but it is likely that he knew of the foundation of a Committee in Berlin. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are the author's.

12 Otto Lehmann-Rußbüldt, "Erste Versuche des Komitees 'Konfessionslos'," *Der Dissident* 6, no. 9 (December 1912): 91–96; and Otto Lehmann-Rußbüldt, "Kirchenaustritt als Demonstration zur Erlangung von Volksrechten," *Das freie Wort* 12, no. 19 (January 1913): 724–726.

13 See Habermas, "Piety," 460; and Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser, eds, *Culture Wars: Secular–Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

means of social control (forced baptisms,[14] impediment of mixed marriages[15]) and by fostering secular identity processes.[16] This administrative shift has been described along processes of secularization, as the autonomy of the administration increased and the field of legal agency expanded to the personal affairs of the individual that now became a citizen in bureaucratic manners.[17]

The option to delete the recorded religious affiliation from the civil registry was not intended with its introduction, but it soon became obvious that the register and the official status of the register entry were tools to express protest. Remarkably, this protest echoed diametrically different attitudes: an anti-religious position for one thing, and a highly religious position for another. The former connected church secession to atheism, materialism, and claims of secularization, whereas the latter, by leaving church, protested against the worldliness and corruption of the Christian church or religion itself in service of the authorities. Both positions were anticlerical, i. e. both criticized the established churches and their personnel. But while anticlericalism was just a segment in the former's anti-Christian or anti-religious agenda, it formed the core of the religious critique of the latter.[18]

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14 In 1873 (when a Saxonian law concerning dissidence had been passed already), the furrier Friedrich Thumen was pursued by the local police of Leipzig because his son (born in 1872) had not yet been baptized. The local pastor had pressed charge on Thumen. The inquiry ran until 1874, when Thumen could prove that his son in the meantime had been baptized in another parish of Leipzig. See Stadtarchiv Leipzig (SAL), Polizeiamt der Stadt Leipzig, Sachakten, Nr. 29 (Anzeige wegen Taufweigerung). The issue of forced baptisms has almost exclusively been discussed in connection with Jewish conversion, whereas research on forced baptisms of the children of non-religious persons is missing.

15 Tillmann Bendikowski, "'Eine Fackel der Zwietracht': Katholisch-protestantische Mischehen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert," in *Konfessionen im Konflikt: Deutschland zwischen 1800 und 1970, Ein zweites konfessionelles Zeitalter*, ed. Olaf Blaschke (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 215–241.

16 In the traditional social setting, the religious and social identity interfered: being member of a certain religious community meant belonging to a certain parish. This inevitable biographical connection to the parish ceased when the town hall became the place where the hard facts of the individual life (birth, marriage, and death) were certified.

17 See José Casanova, "Private and Public Religions," *Social Research* 59 (1992): 17–57; Detlef Pollack, *Säkularisierung – Ein moderner Mythos? Studien zum religiösen Wandel in Deutschland* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 82–94; 132–204; Detlef Pollack, *The Role of Religion in Modern Societies* (London: Routledge, 2008); Detlef Pollack, *Rückkehr des Religiösen? Studien zum religiösen Wandel in Deutschland und Europa II* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 19–104; and Detlef Pollack, *Religion und gesellschaftliche Differenzierung: Studien zum religiösen Wandel in Europa und den USA III* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 67–112.

18 Pietistic or awakened anticlericalism is a form of internal critique of religion. It denounces the established churches to neglect their core function in offering salvation in favor of political

Prior to 1900, only a few freethinkers left church, yet their cases were highly scandalized and mediatized,[19] which is why they could not figure as a role model for a regular church exit. Attempts by a radical anticlerical milieu led by the socialist and anarchist Johann Most to speed up church exits were not successful either – both for internal reasons (the anarchist Most gained no recognition within the party) and external reasons.[20] Church exit was highly estimated among freethinkers as a symbolic act signaling the stringency of lifestyle. But there was no serious effort to introduce it as an exemplary pattern of freethought behavior: belonging without believing seemed the normal case for disaffected or not-participating church members.[21] Consequently, most of the church exits of the nineteenth century rooted in the milieu of the highly religious. The Protestant churches registered most of the secessions as conversions to "other Christian denominations,"[22] that is, the new affiliation was not enlisted in the civil registry. In consequence, being a dissident equaled being highly religious, as it originally denoted members of unacknowledged, mainly Protestant denominations (e. g. Mennonites, Baptists, Methodists). This fundamentally changed at the turn of the twentieth century, when dissidence semantically transformed into *Konfessionslosigkeit*, meaning "not belonging to a religion" or simply being non-religious. The mentioned journal *Der Dissident* illustrates this shift: although the journal promised to be the "Zentralorgan für die Interessen aller Dissidenten" ("the central organ for the matters of all dissidents"), its contents addressed almost exclusively non-religious dissidents.[23]

The release of the journal also marked the point of this semantic change: its first edition was published in 1907 – right after new legislation transformed the

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influence. It corresponds to what Rebekka Habermas has identified as a secularization of Protestantism in her study of the reconfigurations of the religious and the secular in the nineteenth century. (Habermas, "Piety," 457–460.)

19 Johann Most, *Die Gottes-Pest* (New York: Verlag der "Freiheit," 1883); and Traugott von Koppelow, *Mein Austritt aus der Landeskirche*, Flugschriften des Comités "Confessionslos" 2 (Berlin-Schmargendorf: Verlag "Confessionslos," [ca. 1911]).

20 See Kaiser, "Sozialdemokratie," 277. See further Grossman, "Heraus aus der Kirche"; and Groschopp, *Dissidenten.*

21 Olav Aarts, Ariana Need, Manfred Te Grotenhuis and Nan Dirk De Graaf, "Does Belonging Accompany Believing? Correlations and Trends in Western Europe and North America between 1981 and 2000," *Review of Religious Research* 50, no. 1 (2008): 26. The term flips Grace Davie's concept of "believing without belonging" as the modern religious pattern in the UK. Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

22 Hölscher, *Datenatlas.*

23 Horst Groschopp argues differently: the term "dissident" had not been common prior to the *Kulturkampf and* was used then in a non-religious sense. (Groschopp, *Dissidenten*, 17.)

financial settings of the churches fundamentally. Prussia, from then on, began to levy the church taxes systematically for the churches.[24] Consequently, from 1906 onwards, the exit numbers grew and reached a peak in 1909 with 33,814 exits in Berlin.[25] Contemporary observers (and researchers likewise) have since then analyzed the motivations for this rush. Financial reasons, obviously, were a prominent cause to exit church.[26] But money surely was not the only motivation, for low incomes were not taxable. The interviews Ernst Bittlinger, a pastor from Berlin, conducted with dissidents reveal rather strong anticlerical and political incentives.[27] Accordingly, the symbolic aspect of the situation became more important after 1906 – and freethought associations could use this symbolic dimension as a means to prominently introduce their agenda. A church tax collecting state could easily be identified as a manifestation of the close ties between state and church. This narrative fostered the anticlerical prejudice and added to classical narratives of the critique of religion. In the long run, *Konfessionslosigkeit* became a broadly discussed public issue and a performative and symbolic marker.

When speaking of a church exit movement and secularization in respect to church attendances in the Wilhelmine Era, this has to be qualified. The mentioned growth of church secessions was restricted to certain regions and settings

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24 This new fiscal policy coincided with the efforts of modern states to monopolize the administrative access and control over its citizens, thereby conflicting with other societal spheres and their institutions, such as religions and church functionaries. See Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt: Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: C.H.Beck, 2009); and Habermas, "Piety." In fact, the fiscal reform pacified this conflict, as the state allowed the Evangelical State Church of Prussia to inspect the tax records of its members to readjust the church taxes.

25 Hölscher, *Datenatlas*, vol. 2, 474–475. There are some statistical distortions as the "none"-category existed only from 1867 to 1874 and from 1909 onwards. The other years show a remarkably high record of conversions to "other Christian denominations." Highly and non-religious exit motives, thus, seem blurred. Also, no pattern concerning the church exit numbers can be identified – the annual numbers vary in a high degree, from 49 in 1884 to the mentioned 33,814 in 1909. Kaiser, "Sozialdemokratie," 278, calculates different numbers from the police records: 11,063 in 1908 and 9,769 in 1909.

26 Ernst Bittlinger, "Vom Kirchenaustritt in Berlin: Tatsachen und Folgen," *Evangelisch-sozial* 22 (1913): 290–303; Ermel, *Kirchenaustrittsbewegung*; and Kaiser, "Sozialdemokratie," 280. Kaiser notes that the annual tax burdened many families with disproportionally high costs.

27 Bittlinger, "Kirchenaustritt." Neither Bittlinger nor the scholars quoting him take into account that referring to non-religious reasons for secession can also be interpreted as a strategy to fend off discussions with an interrogating religious functionary: religious arguments obviously keep the discussion going, whereas reference to money cuts it off quite easily and impersonally.

– mainly to Protestant, urbanized, and industrialized regions.[28] Prussia and – most exclusively – Berlin did not represent a general trend but constituted an extreme point. Catholic regions and rural areas, on the other hand, show significantly smaller numbers of secession and constant or slowly decreasing church attendance rates. In this respect, Saxony can serve as a counter-example. Urban and highly industrialized regions such as Leipzig and Chemnitz resembled Berlin, albeit on a lower scale, whereas the southern regions (*Erzgebirge* and *Vogtland*) displayed no signs for an accelerated secularization,[29] although they were significantly Protestant and grew as industrial regions with a decentralized, slow-scale urbanization and a strong working-class agency.

Der Dissident

With the growing number of church exits, the issue gained momentum in the anticlerical movement. The manifold German anticlerical press increasingly discussed it – and even made it the central topic of a journal. *Der Dissident* was published from 1907 on as enclosure of the freethought magazine *Das freie Wort* and mainly reported events and debates from the German free religious parishes. Both magazines were published in the *Neuer Frankfurter Verlag* owned by the industrial Arthur Pfungst, an eminent financier of the German freethought scene.[30] Pfungst's reform efforts were multifaceted: he was a member of the Buddhist Mahabodhi Society, president of the Weimar Cartel (an umbrella organization of the German freethought associations), chairman of the *Bund für weltliche Schule und Moralunterricht* (Association for Secular Schools and Moral Education), and a renowned publisher. Pfungst advocated freethought and the critique

28 Remarkably, secession from a religious community was an even more prominent issue among the Jewish community throughout the whole nineteenth century. Quite unsurprisingly, this was not problematized in public, but either welcomed as a means of assimilation and integration or problematized in the accelerating anti-Semitic debates.

29 Hölscher, *Datenatlas*, vol. 2: whereas 56 percent of the Lutheran Protestants of Marienberg (in the *Erzgebirge*) received the Holy Communion in 1910, only 16 percent did so in Leipzig (p. 531, the statistics of the church districts are on p. 549 and pp. 552–553).

30 A comprehensive biography of Pfungst or research on his networks are still missing. A biographical sketch is offered by Hellmuth Hecker, "Arthur Pfungst," in *Lebensbilder deutscher Buddhisten: Ein bio-bibliographisches Handbuch*, vol. 2: *Die Nachfolger* (Constance: Universität Konstanz, ²1997), 252–256. See also Groschopp, *Dissidenten*.

of religion, merged with a religious approach that was founded on individuality and high moral standards.[31]

Initially, *Der Dissident* brought up the discriminatory situation of the free religious parishes and freethinkers in general: the community in Breslau (Wrocław) was not allowed to take possession of an inheritance (the "Erbschaft Müller"-affair); church exits were denied or impeded; free religious burials were prohibited or curtailed; *Jugendweihe*-celebrations were forbidden; and children of community members were forced to attend the religious education lessons in public schools. The journal gave voice to the growing discontent with this treatment. Its critique and its emergent activism mirrored both the development of a clear secular laicist concept of the modern state and the increasing self-confidence of the minority milieu with its self-perception as vanguard of modern society.

From 1912 on, *Der Dissident* was sold as an independent journal. Whereas *Das freie Wort* remained an open platform of the freethought movement, *Der Dissident* focused on questions of church-state relations and the legal dimensions of being a freethinker – marking the high awareness of the issue's potential. Despite its specific set of questions, *Der Dissident* covered a multitude of subjects such as cremation, the secularization of public schools, the moral education in public schools, the decriminalization of blasphemy, the extension of parental rights of mixed couples, the introduction of a non-theist form of oath, the general conditions for the separation of church and state, and – last but not least – the various existing church exit procedures.[32] And although church secession was just one aspect of the journal's agenda, it became its main topic in the years 1912 to 1914. For the journal's editors, authors, and its readership, laicity seemed interesting not only with respect to church secession but also to illustrate the discriminatory religious situation in the German Empire. As the federal states were responsible for laws concerning church exit, each state had its own procedure. *Der Dissident* mapped these differences, documented the intermingling of church and state, and identified inequitable procedures hindering church exits by

31 Interestingly, the study of religion is quite important in his oeuvre: not only did he publish philological and philosophical works on Buddhist sources; he also patronized Max Henning, paying him as the editor of the *Freies Wort*. The orientalist Henning is renowned for his translation of the Qur'an (1901).

32 The journal's broad agenda becomes visible in the indices. Another approach to visualize this diversity is an evaluation of the journal's authors: a wide spectrum of free religious functionaries (preachers, congregation members, moral teachers), but also monists, freethinkers, reformed freemasons, school reformers, and law reformers contributed articles.

hyper-formalized bureaucratic procedures or high fees.[33] The journal's call for a standardized, non-discriminatory procedure was a first attempt to propagate and realize the secularist reform agenda which claimed the separation of church and state and the juridical and formal equality of non-religious citizens. The foundation of the *Komitee Konfessionslos* dynamized this situation in putting this agenda directly into action.

The *Komitee Konfessionslos*

The *Komitee Konfessionslos* started to announce its activities from December 1911/January 1912 on, but it insisted on its official formation in December 1910, when first meetings had taken place.[34] This sort of post-dating was a widespread legitimizing strategy. In the case of the *Komitee* this is relevant in particular, because the year 1911 marked a phase of intensified reformist activities. Thus backdating bestowed the endeavor with a solid air that suggested it was not part of an ephemeral trend, but an independent, consistent project. The Committee declared to be a functioning network of ombudsmen all over the Empire, although no hints concerning the recruitment of these men can be traced. Most of the ombudsmen can be connected to further reformist or secularist networks but it remains unclear how they were contacted and contracted as there are no sources providing internal communication. Freethinker congresses such as the International Monist Congress in Hamburg in September 1911, or the International Freethinker Congress in Munich in September 1912 presumably were good opportunities to extend the network.

The function of the Committee was simple: every ombudsman kept "signing lists for individuals that declare to leave church, if others join them simultaneously. Then, on a fixed date, all these exit declarations are submitted to the

33 Berlin, for example, had a liberal legislation that administered church exits via the local courts and civil registries. This procedure seems one reason for Berlin's high church exit numbers. Saxony's exit procedure, in contrast, was strenuous, for the first step to church exit was a conversation with the local pastor on one's wish to quit church (which the pastor had to receipt). The notification in court was followed by a probation period of six weeks, after which a new court hearing assured the individual's wish to quit church membership. Each step of the procedure entailed costs. See John Mez, "Einheitliche Regelung der Kirchenaustrittsbewegung in den deutschen Bundesstaaten," *Der Dissident* 8, no. 5 (August 1914): 35–40.

34 Otto Lehmann-Rußbüldt, "Das Komitee 'Konfessionslos'," in *Handbuch der freigeistigen Bewegungen Deutschlands, Österreichs und der Schweiz*, ed. Max Henning (Frankfurt/Main: Neuer Frankfurter Verlag, ²1914), 98–109.

courts."[35] The logic resembles that of a contemporary flash mob:[36] individuals with loose social ties agree to gather and act in a certain symbolic way in order to gain public attention. In absence of any social media, the prospective secularists had to sign the lists during public meetings. Secularist journals and local anticlerical associations supported the spread of the idea quite successfully – the meetings were generally well-attended and the lists were long. The press circulated a small number of these deadlines,[37] but they seem to have been abandoned already during the early stages of the *Komitee* – its plan of mobilizing a crowd in the local courts obviously failed. Consequently, the lists were compiled without deadlines and discussed as manifestation of public trends.

The circulation of these lists was accompanied by a rush of propaganda activities: the publication of books, themed brochures, and articles in freethought journals, the organization of mass events, and the conduct of church attendance surveys. These three measures are to be discussed separately, although they intertwine: reports of meetings were published, euphorically praising the number of church exit declarations signed during these meetings; speakers from different associations contributed to the meetings and, thereby, strengthened the ties of the social reform network; and the results of the surveys were discussed and presented during the meetings and in journals. But first, Otto Lehmann-Rußbüldt, head of the Committee and author of most of its texts, will be considered more closely.

The Protagonist: Otto Lehmann-Rußbüldt

The *Komitee Konfessionslos* completely turned out to be a project of Otto Lehmann-Rußbüldt. As secretary of the Committee, he coordinated its activities

35 Otto Lehmann-Rußbüldt, "Der organisierte Kirchenaustritt," *Der Dissident* 5, no. 10 (January 1912): 81–82. Similarly: Otto Lehmann-Rußbüldt, "Komitée 'Konfessionslos'," *Der Monismus* 6, no. 63 (December 1911): 413–414.

36 There is a significant connection between marginalized or minority groups and their fascination with modern techniques of (public) communication. Thus technological "hypermodernity" can be interpreted as a strategy to gain a discursive presence that is consistently obstructed by cultural majorities. This phenomenon is particularly discussed in Jewish history. See Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004). This aspect has been brought up by Carolin Kosuch.

37 "16. Februar und 15. Mai, II. und III. Stichtag der Massenaustritte aus den Landeskirchen," *Der Dissident* 6, no. 11 (January 1913): 119–120.

and was the primary contact person of the ombudsmen. He also continuously published articles and brochures[38] on behalf of the Committee – mostly in *Der Dissident*, but also in other freethought or progressivist journals, where he reported about upcoming activities and projects.[39] As a book trader, Lehmann-Rußbüldt was one of the few protagonists of Wilhelmine freethought without any academic background. He earned his living by selling monist books via mail-order and by reporting parliamentary proceedings.[40] The published reports of the Committee are vague as to whether Lehmann-Rußbüldt received a salary or allowances for his work (e. g. remuneration for authoring or lecturing).[41]

When he started promoting church exit, Lehmann-Rußbüldt was part of the German reform scene already: he had been secretary of the *Giordano Bruno Bund* founded by Bruno Wille,[42] which made him a member of the free religious and freethought circles of Berlin and also brought him into contact with the Monist League. This bond was intensified when Wilhelm Ostwald became president of the league and established a networking strategy that connected monism – taken as an epistemological approach – to different reform practices such as school reform, juridical reform, reform architecture and urban planning, *Lebensreform*, abstinence, etc. Church secession, obviously, became a relevant aspect within this network.[43] Lehmann-Rußbüldt noted that the Committee took shape during the International Monist Congress in Hamburg with Ostwald as the catalyst and himself an active participant in the proceedings.[44] Ostwald also mediated the Committee's participation in the Weimar Cartel in 1912.[45]

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38 Most notably: Otto Lehmann-Rußbüldt, *Der geistige Befreiungskrieg durch Kirchenaustritt* (Berlin: Komitee Konfessionslos, Frankfurt/Main: Neuer Frankfurter Verlag, [4]1914).

39 He regularly wrote for the monist journals *Der Monismus* (Monism), *Das Monistische Jahrhundert* (The Monist Century), *Das freie Wort* (The Free Word), and *Der Weg* (The Way). (Lehmann-Rußbüldt, "Komitée 'Konfessionslos'" [*Der Monismus*]; Lehmann-Rußbüldt, "Kirchenaustritt als Demonstration" [*Das freie Wort*]; and Lehmann-Rußbüldt, "Bibelstunden im Gefängnis," *Das Monistische Jahrhundert* 3, no. 2–3 [April 1914]: 43–46.)

40 Gröf, "Lehmann-Rußbüldt."

41 Otto Lehmann-Rußbüldt, "Finanzbericht 1913," *Der Dissident* 7, no. 12 (March 1914): 126.

42 See Karin Bruns, "Giordano Bruno Bund," in *Handbuch literarisch-kultureller Vereine, Gruppen und Bünde 1825–1933*, ed. Wulf Wülfing, Karin Bruns and Rolf Parr (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1998), 163–175.

43 See Katharina Neef, *Die Entstehung der Soziologie aus der Sozialreform* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2012), 127–134; and Katharina Neef, "Multiple Devianz: Zu Fassbarkeit und Struktur eines alternativkulturellen Phänomens," in *Dynamik und Devianz: Festschrift für Hubert Seiwert zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Christoph Kleine, Edith Franke and Heinz Mürmel (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 185–203.

44 "Kirchenaustritt von 20 Volksschullehrern," *Der Dissident* 6, no. 3 (June 1912): 22. But in 1914, Lehmann-Rußbüldt claimed to have developed this idea as early as 1909 and to have founded

As already mentioned, the question of Lehmann-Rußbüldt's sustenance remains vague. He obviously lacked the financial resources of his bourgeois fellow functionaries. The activity reports of the Committee indicate that his funding could not have been generous – the operated sums are in total quite small. Additionally, he continuously stressed the transitional character of the venture: to him, it was an auxiliary means for strengthening equal civil rights. "The Committee will be dissolved once its aim is reached," as the statute emphasized.[46] And really, the Committee was not re-arranged in 1919, when the Weimar Constitution guaranteed non-confessional civil rights, the church exit procedure was simplified, and an unseen rush of church exits brought the minority of non-church-members up to a percental scale.[47]

However, since this self-dissolution coincided with Lehmann-Rußbüldt's shift of interest toward pacifism and internationalism that detracted him further from the Committee, the situation of 1918–19 can also be interpreted as a missing re-arrangement. Lehmann-Rußbüldt co-founded the *Bund Neues Vaterland* (League of the New Fatherland) and became secretary of the German branch of the *Internationale Liga für Menschenrechte* (International Human Rights Federation). After imprisonment by the National Socialists in 1933, he emigrated to England in November 1933 and became an active member of the British anti-Hitler propaganda initiatives.[48] His pacifist and anti-militarist engagement earned him merits in the Federal Republic of Germany, whereas his secularist agency is hitherto undiscussed.

Organizing a national church exit campaign, therefore, remained only an episode in the reformist biography of Lehmann-Rußbüldt. And although his activities varied throughout his life, they all seem to have led him to participate in an interconnected, multiple network of movements and associations. In there, he professionalized and actively pursued his interests in naturalist literature, free religious thought, church exit, internationalism, human rights, and antimilitarism. In this way, he was a typical representative of "multiple deviance" – the

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the Committee in 1910. With the Monist Congress, the Committee would have just "broadened its tasks." (Lehmann-Rußbüldt, "Komitee," [*Handbuch*] 99–101.)

45 Henning, *Handbuch*, 7–11; 20–29.

46 Lehmann-Rußbüldt, "Komitee," [*Handbuch*] 99.

47 Hölscher, *Datenatlas*.

48 Furness, "Lehmann-Rußbueldt," 87–98.

intersection of different alternative attitudes and practices, condensing in a nonconformist lifestyle.[49]

Text Strategies and Motifs

The contents and actual focus of the written material concerning the question of church secession cover a wide range. Agitating pamphlets form an essential part of these writings, in particular manuscripts of propaganda speeches that were given in order to motivate leaving church. This argument was also at the core of brochures and can be traced – often rather indirectly – in newspapers or police reports. Also *Der Dissident* repeatedly printed calls to quit church membership.[50]

The brochure texts by Wilhelm Ostwald offer insight in this kind of writing. Though the preservation of secularist grey literature is sometimes quite contingent, Ostwald – a prominent figure in the progressivist network – strove ardently to publish his views. He regularly released the *Monistische Sonntagspredigten* (Monist Sunday Sermons) from 1912 on to broaden and to push forward the freethought agenda. Thereby, he connected a wide spectrum of freethought key issues and potential freethought topics to actual political subjects in the light of monism.[51] Church secession is discussed thrice in these sermons.[52] In April

49 On "multiple deviance" (Heinz Mürmel): Neef, "Multiple Devianz." On "religious nonconformism": Christoph Kleine, "Religiöser Nonkonformismus als religionswissenschaftliche Kategorie," *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 23, no. 1 (2015): 3–34.

50 See, e.g., Georg Kramer, "Kirchenaustritt und Arbeiterschaft," *Der Dissident* 6, no. 2 (May 1912): 9–12; and Heinz Albin, "Aufklärung ins Volk!," *Der Dissident* 6, no. 3 (June 1912): 25–32.

51 The sermons were published from April 1911 to March 1916. They were included to the league's magazine *Das Monistische Jahrhundert* also published by Ostwald. The amount of monist publications – journals, brochures, pamphlets, books, anthologies, art prints, etc. – gives a vivid understanding of the potentials of the freethought (book) market. See Katharina Neef, "Biografische Kontexte für Wilhelm Ostwalds Engagement im Deutschen Monistenbund," *Mitteilungen der Wilhelm-Ostwald-Gesellschaft zu Großbothen e. V.* 14, no. 3 (2009): 36–46.

52 Wilhelm Ostwald, "Kirchenaustritt: 53. Predigt," *Monistische Sonntagspredigten: Dritte Reihe* (Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsanstalt, 1913), 1–8; Wilhelm Ostwald, "Kirchenaustritt: II. 97. Predigt," *Monistische Sonntagspredigten: Vierte Reihe* (Leipzig: Unesma, 1914), 321–336; and Wilhelm Ostwald, *Die Gegner des Kirchenaustritts* (Leipzig: Unesma, 1914). The third text is grey literature: Originally published on April 11, 1914, it was not re-published in the fifth volume of *Monistische Sonntagspredigten*. It is preserved as enclosure to *Das Monistische Jahrhundert*. An abridged version can be found in: Wilhelm Ostwald, *Wissenschaft contra Gottesglaube: Aus den atheistischen Schriften des großen Chemikers*, ed. Friedrich Herneck (Leipzig: Urania, 1960), 139–144.

1912, slightly after Lehmann-Rußbüldt announced the foundation of the Committee in *Der Dissident*, Ostwald called his fellow monists to quit their church membership and to contact the newly established *Komitee*.[53] Also, he emphasized the role model function of individual church exits for the whole movement. But above all, he praised the liberating effects of formal secession as "eine *innere Klärung und Stärkung*" ("an *inner purification and revitalization*").[54] Leaving church is framed as an ethical standard: both as a conceivable, empirical manifestation of a certain non-religious worldview and as a symbolic act of performing straightness and honesty (contrasting clerical hypocrisy). Hence, church exit became a prominent performative moment in a practical model of what Ostwald called *wissenschaftliche Weltanschauung* (scientific worldview). He specified this idea in contrasting a dualist (i. e. religious) and a monist (resp. scientistic) worldview: "Denn Monismus bedeutet grundsätzliche Einheitlichkeit des gesamten Denkens und Handelns und ist daher der Gegensatz aller doppelten Buchführung." ("Monism means unity of thought and action and is the opposite of any double-entry accounting.")[55] This principle, then, is directly transferred to the question of church membership which Ostwald approached with a scientistic reading: lifestyle and worldview should apply to each other; they should form a reciprocal system of reference. Ostwald postulated a straight logical relation between all spheres of life, with theory (science) informing practice. Church exit, thus, became a vital element of a scientific or scientifically informed lifestyle, while monism or freethought were paralleled with progress, truth, altruism, solidarity, and science and functioned as counterpart of (church) religion. Consequently, science, in Ostwald's view, was not framed as a cultural practice, but hypertrophied as a producer of meanings, worldviews, ethical creeds, and normative foundations of social behavior.[56]

Ostwald framed his logic by using an antithetical argumentation with the churches and church membership portrayed as conservative, authoritative remnants of an overcome past: "Orthodoxy is not a distinct doctrine, it is a distinct method. […] Dogmas are exclusively used to maintain the inner need to obey

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53 Ostwald, "Kirchenaustritt: 53. Predigt," 8.

54 Ibid., emphasis in the original.

55 Wilhelm Ostwald, "Warum sind wir Monisten? Erste Predigt," in *Monistische Sonntagspredigten: Erste Reihe* (Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsanstalt, 1911), 7.

56 See the discussion on "scientism": Ian Barbour, *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues* (London: SCM Press, 1998); and Richard G. Olson, *Science and Scientism in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

among the people and among the subordinate clergy."[57] To Ostwald, institutionalized religion was a tool to preserve the power of the ruling minorities. His sermon of 1914 even fortified this anti-religious narrative (religion being an intentional fraud).[58] But it remained completely open whether the freethought discourse referred to religion in its institutionalized form or to religious phenomena in general. Consequently, Ostwald's critical impetus meandered between anticlerical and anti-religious approaches that caused a lack of clarity amongst both fellows and critics.[59]

This antithetical pattern – corrupted, outdated, naive religion vs. progressive, honest science – neither did simply form the illustrative background nor was pure polemics. Rather, as an analysis of *Der Dissident* suggests, this antithesis is to be understood as a normative pattern of argumentation and behavior: although church exit was often discussed in terms of finances,[60] it is the idealistic frame that was most prominently referred to. Church exit was the performative act of a conversion – to *Konfessionslosigkeit*, modernity, and science. Therefore *Der Dissident* hinted: "If all those leaving church transferred the annual amount of their church tax to the Committee – to document that they did not secede for economic reasons –, it would have plenty of resources to fullfil its tasks."[61] The idealistic frame indicates two strategic directions: on the one hand, it addressed the internal, freethinking audience by reproducing and stressing the self-image of altruistic agency in order to promote social development and progress. On the other, it became a manifestation of a high standard of individual morality. The external message, obviously, was to rebut the critical cliché of stingy dissidents saving money by church exit.

At this point, a closely connected second narrative can be identified: the anticlerical publications on church exit tied worldview to morality and presented the established Christian churches as morally corrupt institutions. This narrative

57 Ostwald, "Kirchenaustritt: 53. Predigt," 5. Ostwald describes religion using the metaphor of a royal court that upholds its regime by pretending the long dead king would still be alive.
58 Ostwald, "Kirchenaustritt II," 327–328.
59 See Johannes Gleixner, *"Menschheitsreligionen": T. G. Masaryk, A. V. Lunacarskij und die religiöse Herausforderung revolutionärer Staaten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 108–109; 175.
60 Financial issues connected to church membership and church exit include high fees for families, the church taxes, the considerable incomes of the churches secured by these taxes, and the impact of massively reduced church tax incomes caused by mass exits.
61 Lehmann-Rußbüldt, "Erste Versuche," 96. The quote is a postscript by the editors. It also reveals the tight financial situation of the Committee: Wilhelm Ostwald stated that, in 1913, the *Komitee Konfessionslos* survived only with financial support of the Monist League. (Ostwald, "Kirchenaustritt II," 322.)

relates to a contrasting one, namely the thesis of the moral corruption of the institution – which intensifies its antithesis, that is: the high moral standard of the church-seceding individual:

> On the one hand, it is obvious that every monist has to demonstrate ostentatiously his inner freedom by separating from the confessional church he hitherto belonged to. On the other hand, it seems opportune to strengthen the liberal wing of the churches. […] But it is often the case that a measure advised as "tactical" turns out to be a measure that a righteous man cannot undertake with good conscience.[62]

This connection of freethought agency to morals was ubiquitous and multifaceted. First, it functioned as a defense strategy, for freethought had long since been confronted with the critique of amorality because of its denial of the existence of a transcendent point of reference for the justification and legitimation of its moral standards. To emphasize a peculiar morality was to fence of this critique. Second, contemporaneous interpretations of cultural degeneration were closely connected to discussions of decreasing morality among wider parts of society. Approaches to re-moralize the Western civilization (and/or its colonies) were a typical concern for bourgeois agents of that time.[63] By partaking in this discourse, freethinkers ostentatiously claimed to be a vital element of the hegemonial bourgeois stratum in which they inscribed themselves even stronger through their protest and, in this way, stressed their assertion. Finally, secularists aimed at legitimizing their public agency by turning their moral agenda into a social venture.

The moral topos leads to a third motive: whereas Ostwald strengthened the individual responsibility of the citizen to justify and encourage church secession, Gustav Tschirn emphasized parental responsibility. Tschirn was the president of the DBFG. Thus he mostly addressed families[64] and advocated parental church secession as a necessity to protect children from the allegedly malevolent influ-

62 Ostwald, "Kirchenaustritt: 53. Predigt," 1–2.

63 A paradigmatic reference for this discourse is the *Institute International pour la Diffusion des Expériences Sociales* (International Institute for the Dissemination of Social Experiences) of Rudolf/Rodolphe Broda. See Verbruggen and Carlier, "Laboratories of Social Thought"; and Bregt Saenen, "'Pour la diffusion des expériences sociales" – een onderzoek naar documents du progrès binnen de transnationale ruimte aan het begin van de twintigste eeuw" (MA thesis, University of Gent, 2008), accessed March 27, 2020, http://lib.ugent.be/fulltxt/RUG01/001/376/209/RUG01-001376209_2010_0001_AC.pdf.

64 The freethought press was dominated by male authors and it addressed male readers with different familial status. Parental rights were also discussed in the monist press, but less frequently compared to the free religious press, where issues such as religious school education, complementary or substituting moral education, and *Jugendweihe* were regularly addressed.

ence of organized Christianity. Dwelling on the educational aims of the moral education lessons given in the secularist congregations, he advertised them not only to members:

> 1. The children should [...] know and understand the religious conditions [...], their variety and tradition; they respect them in their historical context.
>
> 2. They have a solid, clear scientifically based worldview.
>
> 3. They are educated to dedicate their life to the development of mankind; it will be their honor and pleasure to manifest high moral standards in their personal conduct of life.[65]

Countering Tschirn's appraisal, the philosopher, monist, and ethicist Friedrich Jodl admonished a professionalization of the pedagogic endeavors in public schools and, moreover, favored secular schools without confessional religious education but with a strong impetus on ethical lessons.[66] His program did not stop at children: being a prominent functionary of the Vienna university extension, he also called for an improved adult education – with professional scientific courses based on a pedagogy "that touches on the key questions of life with a steady hand; [in other words: we need] a popular philosophy and wisdom by experience."[67]

A fourth prominent motif relates to the question of how to address those who already left church or rather: how to re-integrate them to join free religious, ethical, monist, or freethought communities. Seeing them as prospective members was not only an expansive strategy, but also mirrored the conviction that non-religiousness meant a threat to morality.[68] Individuals without constant moral address were seen as defunct and had to be reached to find edification. This patriarchal ethical mission is a variation of the mentioned bourgeois supremacy narrative. In this light, Otto Lehmann-Rußbüldt and the *Komitee Konfessionslos* also suggested a new social affiliation to those who had left church:

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65 Gustav Tschirn, "Die freireligiöse Bewegung in Deutschland und ihre Zukunft," *Dokumente des Fortschritts* 7, no. 4 (April 1914): 201.

66 Friedrich Jodl, "Die Kirchenaustrittsbewegung und was aus ihr folgt," *Das freie Wort* 10, no. 8 (July 1910): 304–307. Jodl inverted the moral argument: he called the established churches immoral when he accuses them "to recoin their spiritual riches to circulating cash" (304). This reference to economic drives is definitely pejorative.

67 Jodl, "Kirchenaustrittsbewegung," 302–303.

68 When attacking the churches in the mentioned article, Friedrich Jodl concurrently criticized another antagonist: "Only social democracy compares to clerical organizations concerning the activity and intensity of their sales in ideas." (Jodl, "Kirchenaustrittsbewegung," 304). Jodl, at this point, denounced social democracy's reduction to economic factors and its neglect of humanitarian ideals.

"Membership in one of the freethought associations united in the Weimar Cartel is highly recommended to anyone who leaves church by the activity of this committee."[69]

And a last narrative can be traced, albeit almost exclusively in social democratic circles. Here, church exit was framed politically, taken as an active instrument to weaken the suppressive state. This narrative followed a fiscal logic: the established churches are run by church taxes; if they lose this income, they would either need state money to secure their existence and by this become a burden, or they would be unable to uphold their agency in favor of the state. In any case, targeting the church meant hitting the state. When a bourgeois freethought audience was addressed, this argument was generally de-economized and de-politicized: the stress, then, was on weakening the clerical influence.

This differentiation also accounts for press reports. The reviewed joint mass events of bourgeois and social democrat activists were discussed differently in the bourgeois respectively the proletarian freethinker press: both focused on "their" speakers with detailed prints of their contributions, yet just summarizing, commenting, or even criticizing the other statements.[70]

Mass Events

The years 1913 and 1914 saw a rush of organized propaganda meetings advocating church secession. The dynamics of social events met with a sympathetic audience receiving the secular messages and afterwards multiplying the narratives. Their impact, thus, significantly increased. Initially, Lehmann-Rußbüldt networked intensely to posit the Committee as a flexible player in the social reform and freethought movement: he advocated his work during the meetings of several freethought associations, e. g. the DMB, DFB, and the Weimar Cartel. Simultaneously, he won over freethought celebrities as patrons: Ernst Haeckel, Wilhelm Ostwald (both DMB), Gustav Tschirn (DFB), Bruno Wille (BFGD), Ludwig Gurlitt (an influential German educational reformer), Arthur Drews (a well-known speaker), and Georg Zepler (a social democratic politician and editor of *Der Weg*). By 1913, this strategy proved successful: the Committee received funding from the secularist associations and had a good standing in the bourgeois freethought public.

69 Lehmann-Rußbüldt, "Kirchenaustritt," [*Dissident*] 82.

70 "Massenstreik gegen die Staatskirche," *Der Atheist* 9, no. 48 (December 1913): 363 – 365; and Karl Liebknecht, "Politischer Kirchenboykott," *Der Atheist* 9, no. 49 (December 1913): 387.

The practical level of the Committee's work, by contrast, was more complicated. Its original motive of igniting a "mass secession" on an appointed date failed. The intended "flash mob" – the physical presence of lots of activists in the courts – never materialized. But the public interest during information meetings and propaganda events grew immensely. In October 1912, a lecture evening with the Berlin free religious protagonists Bruno Wille and Gustav Tschirn attracted more than 1,000 listeners.[71] Consequently, the strategy changed. The Committee now organized propaganda events to advocate church exit and, to this end, invited speakers to discuss the threads of clericalism and the benefits of secularism. While the narrative of an organized mass exit was kept up and there were still lists laid out during the events, they now functioned as individual incentives for a personal decision rather than actually targeting a fixed date of mass exit. The Committee greatly valued the symbolic act of sympathizers signing a list who, by this, personally engaged in a covenant. However, the meaning of the act of signing was ambiguous: the secularist activists grasped the signatures as a promise, the subscribers, though, considered them as a sign of sympathy or as supporting a petition. Instead of agitating and leading local mass movements, the ombudsmen turned out to be local contact persons to provide help with the complex exit procedure and, in some cases, they also received money from the Committee to finance the church exit of poor people or whole families.

By 1913, the emphasis was on the mentioned mass events to propagate church secession, for which the Committee became prominent: Lehmann-Rußbüldt succeeded in mobilizing well-known social democrats who publicly joined the protagonists of the bourgeois freethought movement.[72] The manifestations were headlined "Massenstreik gegen die Staatskirche" ("Mass Strike against the State Church") and clearly indicated a relation to the socialist movement as this motto marked the utopian potential attributed to the endeavor. The mass strike was discussed as the ultima ratio of political agency and gained an almost eschatological significance: it was considered a means with both unifying and revolutionary potential.[73] The instrumentalization of this central anti-capitalist mythologeme for a particularistic issue such as church membership is an

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71 Lehmann-Rußbüldt, "Komitee," [*Handbuch*] 102–103.

72 Ibid., 104.

73 For the socialist discussion, see Rosa Luxemburg, *Massenstreik, Partei und Gewerkschaften* (Hamburg: Erdmann Dubber, 1906); and Karl Kautsky, *Der politische Massenstreik* (Berlin: Vorwärts, 1914). See also Michael L. Hughes, "'The Knife in the Hands of the Children'? Debating the Political Mass Strike and Political Citizenship in Imperial Germany," *Labor History* 50, no. 2 (2009): 113–138; and John D. Bies, "A Transnational Perspective of the Evolution of Rosa Luxemburg's Theory of the Mass Strike," *Critique* 46, no. 2 (2018): 185–219.

important incident. Not only does it mirror the importance the contemporaries attached to it but it also highlights the communicative process that linked the bourgeois activists to the proletarian speakers by adapting the revolutionary social democratic language to the bourgeois discourse.[74] This adaptation further underlined the self-image of the freethinkers as nonconformist avant-garde of their time. Finally, this instrumentalization explains the critique brought forward against the Committee by social democrats: the particularization of the general proletarian myth seemed like a blasphemous act.

On October 28, 1913, these propaganda efforts reached their uncontested peak, when four simultaneous conventions took place in Berlin, each in a working-class district and led by prominent speakers of both milieus. In Moabit, the free religious Wilhelm Klauke and the social democrat Adolph Hoffmann gave speeches. Wilmersdorf was mobilized by the already mentioned Bruno Wille, the social democrat Ewald Vogtherr, and Lilli Jannasch, an activist of the secular school movement, of pacifism, and monism. The mentioned free religious Gustav Tschirn and the social democrat Heinrich Peus agitated Friedrichshain. And Wilhelm Ostwald and Karl Liebknecht spoke in Neukölln.[75] But a closer look reveals that the dichotomy of bourgeoisie and working class was just illusive. With the exception of Karl Liebknecht, all social democratic protagonists were also active freethinkers: Vogtherr and Hoffmann were eminent members of Berlin's free religious parish;[76] the social democrat and member of the *Reichstag* Peus was a monist and an old acquaintance of Ostwald with whom he shared the commitment for the planned language Ido.[77] All social democrats framed their efforts for secularism as a private intervention and not as a functionary's duty, because the party resolution of 1875 had declared religion a private matter and no topic for party politics.[78]

74 Otto Lehmann-Rußbüldt, "Massenstreik gegen die Staatskirche: 1328 Austrittserklärungen an einem Tage," *Das Monistische Jahrhundert* 2, no. 32 (November 1913): 900 – 902. On the other hand, the social democrats avoided the term "mass strike" and preferred "mass exodus" or "boycott." (Liebknecht, "Politischer Kirchenboykott.")

75 Lehmann-Rußbüldt, "Massenstreik." The event was discussed throughout the German public.

76 Todd Weir, *Secularism*, 203; 242.

77 Peus' agitation for the world language met the critique and ridicule of his social democrat fellows. When he spoke about Ido on a party congress, the delegates mocked him during his speech. See *Handbuch der sozialdemokratischen Parteitage von 1910 bis 1913* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1910 – 1913), 266 (Peus on the Congress in Magdeburg 1910).

78 See Sebastian Prüfer, *Sozialismus statt Religion: Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie vor der religiösen Frage, 1863 – 1890* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002); and Grossman, "Heraus aus der Kirche."

Although these meetings were highly criticized within the participating associations, the joint venture of Berlin served as a performative pattern. Sequels took place in Leipzig on January 9 and February 6, 1914. During the January meeting, 4,500 attendees gathered in a ballroom to listen to Wilhelm Ostwald and Heinrich Peus.[79] Even though the social democrat *Leipziger Volkszeitung* was dissatisfied with the contents of the speeches (Ostwald was too shallow, Peus was too defensive and spoke – as expected – on the world language),[80] the daily paper promoted another, even bigger manifestation to be held in February. The three parallel meetings of this second venture were all situated in Leipzig's working class districts and were organized by the *Vereinigtes Komitee für Kirchenaustritt* (Joint Committee for Church Secession), a joint venture of the local monist branch and the local branch of the *Zentralverband proletarischer Freidenker* (Association of Proletarian Freethinkers) with two speakers on every location: the SPD-politician Adolf Thiele and the already mentioned Lilli Jannasch at the *Volkshaus* (the local headquarters of the trade unions in southern Leipzig); the social democrat editor Richard Wagner from Braunschweig and a certain Dr. (Arthur?[81]) Westphal from Stuttgart at the *Schlosskeller* (situated in the East of Leipzig), and the notorious Hans Leuß (author of *Die Neue Zeit*) and the secretary of the *Proletarian Freethinkers* Bernhard Menke from Dresden at the *Felsenkeller* (in the West of Leipzig).[82] The events were attended by 5,000 visitors.[83] Significantly, almost all speakers were social democrats. Although the monist Willy Bloßfeldt worked as the central organizer of the propaganda event,[84] no renowned representative of the bourgeois freethought movement made his public appearance during the Leipzig-venture. Heinrich Peus even mentioned having visited Leipzig on February 7, but he does not reference the secession agitation right before his stay.[85] Moreover, the event was not reported

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79 "Leipzig," *Der Atheist* 10, no. 6 (February 1914): 46.

80 "Freie Weltanschauung gegen Staatskirche," *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, January 10, 1914, 2nd supplement.

81 That is just an assumption. Dr. Arthur Westphal was secretary to the Stuttgart branch of the *Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft*.

82 "Zur Kirchenaustrittsbewegung," *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, February 7, 1914, 2.

83 "Leipzig," *Der Atheist* 10, no. 9 (March 1914): 68.

84 Willy Bloßfeldt, "Die Leipziger Polizei gegen die Kirchenaustrittsbewegung," *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, February 5, 1914, 2nd supplement.

85 Heinrich Peus, "Praktischer Monismus," *Das Monistische Jahrhundert* 2, no. 48 (February 1914): 1351. Instead, he refers to an exhibition on hygiene he had visited accidentally. This article illustrates Peus' affiliation to bourgeois discussions and his self-perception as monist rather than social democrat – at least in non-proletarian media.

in *Das Monistische Jahrhundert* which is remarkable because Bloßfeldt was its editor.[86]

The situation in Leipzig seems of particular interest for three reasons: first, it illustrates the copied patterns, the comparable success, and the parallel discussions in Berlin and Leipzig. Both events indicate the topic's mobilizing potential in the time immediately preceding the First World War. Lehmann-Rußbüldt obviously succeeded in connecting the subject to pressing political questions and to make it a "Forderung des Tages."[87] He took advantage of politicizing a hitherto non-political but rather religious question, thereby implementing a secularist pattern to gain public attention. This leads to a more complex question, i.e. the practical shift of boundaries. By staging church exit as a political act, religion was critically publicized. This not only provoked the critique of religious institutions, but also of social democrats, who preferred to leave religion a private matter. Thus the publicity or privacy of religion turns out to be a highly flexible marker within the politico-religious sphere.[88] Second, the comparison with Leipzig relativizes the argument that the church exit movement was only recognizable in Berlin with its easy church exit procedure, its deep-reaching every-day-life secularization, and the particularity of its social democrat free religious parish.[89] In Leipzig, an anticlerical audience could be agitated. The network of secularist ombudsmen throughout the *Reich* supports this impression: church secession had become an issue not only in Berlin, but also outside of Prussia, in Catholic regions, and in less urbanized communities. Third, the resemblance also points to remarkable differences: whereas the agitation induced a real growth of secession numbers in the capital, it failed outside of Berlin. Church exit propaganda meetings aroused the interest of many contemporaries, but they failed to induce activities and interests beyond an entertaining evening or fostering one's anticlerical stereotypes and anti-religious prejudices.

86 *Das Monistische Jahrhundert* does not mention the events, neither Bloßfeldt's nor Lehmann-Rußbüldt's articles, who gave an account of the Committee's activities in January 1914.

87 This is a contemporary key term coined by Wilhelm Ostwald. Semantically, it refers to a necessary duty or a challenge. Wilhelm Ostwald, *Die Forderung des Tages* (Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsanstalt, 1911).

88 Casanova, "Private and Public Religions."

89 Kaiser, " Sozialdemokratie und 'praktische' Religionskritik," 277–279.

Practicing Science – Staging Scientism: Anticlerical Surveys

A last aspect to capture the Committee's impact is its recourse on statistics – an attempt to perform a specifically scientific habitus: Committee members counted church visitors to prove their proposition of a vanishing social influence of religion. To this end, the Committee organized the observation of every church in Berlin on May 18, 1913 – followed by other cities such as Leipzig and Chemnitz.[90] The results seemed to support the assumptions of the anticlerical movement: no church was fully crowded; most of the few attendees were elderly women and children – usually the choir.[91] This result surely was polemic and the method of collecting the data was questioned, but in the end, the churches admitted that attendance was decreasing, even if the collected numbers were adjusted upwards.[92]

With this evaluation of religious practice, the *Komitee* affirmed three of its major claims. First and most notably, the statistical analysis comprised a critique of established religion. Pointing to empty churches was to deny the representative functions and relevance of public religion: the unity of throne and altar became obsolete, if church influence decreased so obviously and no longer could support the political sphere of power. Second, the Committee, by organizing such surveys, demonstrated its manpower because a certain number of activists were needed to observe all churches in Berlin and other cities and to analyze the obtained data. A third aspect refers to the practice of producing statistics. By independently collecting the relevant data, the secularist milieu not only indirectly criticized the regular academic staff for not having recognized the potential of the topic, they also directly claimed to have scientific capabilities themselves. By applying statistical methods to their field, the overall non-academic members of the Committee adopted scientific modes of practice. By this, they emphasized

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90 Otto Lehmann-Rußbüldt, "Miszellen zur Kirchenbesuchsstatistik," *Der Dissident* 7, no. 6 (September 1913): 77–79; and Lehmann-Rußbüldt, "Komitee," [*Handbuch*] 103. See also Arthur Wolf, "Kirchenbesuch in Leipzig," *Der Atheist* 10, no. 12 (March 1914): 90. Wolf presented a sample but called his fellows to engage in a general survey.

91 Otto Lehmann-Rußbüldt, "Eine Kirchenbesuchs-Statistik," *Der Dissident* 7, no. 4 (July 1913): 41–47.

92 *Statistischer Bericht über die Zustände in der evangelisch-lutherischen Landeskirche Sachsens in den Jahren 1911 bis 1918* (Dresden: Meinhold, 1919), 6 (tab. II b and II c.); 8 (tab. II e). See also Hölscher, *Datenatlas*. On a contemporary polemics, see Erich Schairer, "Die Entkirchlichung in Zahlen," *Der Dissident* 7, no. 8 (November 1913): 89–93.

their claim of producing knowledge and substantiated their self-image as scientific agents – that is: they framed their secularism in terms of non-partisan, descriptive, positive, and empirical agency. This strategy legitimized their efforts and – simultaneously – delegitimized (religious) critique against this agency as particular and normative.

The statistics raised by the Committee were discussed not only within the anticlerical milieu, but also in a broader public, which offers the possibility to take into account the long-range influences of the anticlerical discourse. By providing the public with data, the discussion of religion versus secularity gained a new perspective – religion, now, was debated in its practical dimensions. Being Christian increasingly was connected to quantitative measures such as church attendance, the frequency of communion, and the participation in other religious activities. At the same time, (unqualified) church membership became less relevant as a marker of (confessional) identity; the status of cultural Protestantism as a religion was questioned.

Internal Critique against the Committee

Whereas these statistics were highly appreciated by secularists, the activities of the *Komitee Konfessionslos* also met harsh critique, especially from the social democrat wing. It mostly centered on effectiveness, imbalance of costs and efforts, and ideological reasons. In 1914, their journal *Der Atheist* disapproved of the work of the Committee, complaining about the lacking involvement of the bourgeois partners: "Workers and the proletarian freethinkers keep the local committees working, whereas the monists often just give their name and some money."[93] But also the monists criticized this cooperation. Most monists stayed church members for fear of discrimination and because they realized that workers who had left church did not become monists. Therefore, the benefits of the investments were openly questioned.[94] Further indications on this are missing in the monist sources because, here, the cooperation was labelled as a success.

The editor of *Der Atheist*, Arthur Wolf, also questioned the venture. The propaganda meetings in Leipzig in January and February 1914 – with only 150 declarations to leave church – produced no significant outcomes compared to

93 "Der Monistentag in Leipzig," *Der Atheist* 10, no. 19 (May 1914): 150.
94 Ibid.

the huge efforts.[95] Moreover, “necessary agitation was made by our members [the Proletarian freethinkers]; the immense crowd at the meeting resulted completely from their efforts.”[96] Wolf openly criticized two misbalanced conditions: the efforts and results in general and the efforts made by the Proletarian Freethinkers and by the bourgeois freethought associations. The Proletarian Freethinkers questioned the cooperation in the joint committees, because they saw themselves doing the main work, while the monists just played a representative role. The monists, on the other hand, suspected to work in favor of the proletarian freethinkers’ member lists rather than for their own interests. Both groups assumed a disproportional gain on the other side. This suggests that there were no gains at all – neither was there a new potential of members to recruit nor much prestige to win. A report of Lehmann-Rußbüldt strengthens this impression:

> It was found that the church exit movement should not be mixed up with the direct proselytization for the freethought organizations. The simultaneous attempt to recruit members for one of these associations often results in the withdrawal of a planned church exit. The committee members admit that they failed as a mobilizer of organized dissidence.[97]

The proletarian view (of doing the work while others benefitted from the results) paralleled the general socialist interpretation of the capitalist state of society: consequently, the cooperation itself was questioned fundamentally. Heinrich Ficks ranted in the *Atheist* against the monists and the DMB:

> The Monist League is capitalist to the bone. Its beginnings were hopeful, but it developed quite anti-labor. The free religious parishes are voicing the bourgeois, educated, atheist capitalists. […] We can only get rid of church, capitalism, and religion by promoting the Marxist worldview. […] We are a political organization of social democrat freethinkers and it is impossible to cooperate with bourgeois freethinkers.[98]

Naturally, Lehmann-Rußbüldt as the driving force behind the cooperation reported a different result. He stated significantly rising numbers of dissident children in public schools requiring new arrangements for their religious education and –

95 Arthur Wolf, “Die Kirchenaustrittsbewegung in Sachsen,” *Der Atheist* 10, no. 15 (April 1914): 113.
96 “Leipzig,” [February 1914] 46.
97 Otto Lehmann-Rußbüldt, “Ein Experiment in Neukölln (307 Kirchenaustritte auf einmal!),” *Der Dissident* 7, no. 7 (October 1913): 85 – 86.
98 Heinrich Ficks, “Bürgerliches und proletarisches Freidenkertum: Auszug aus einem Vortrag,” *Der Atheist* 10, no. 11 (March 1914): 81.

as a general trend – indicating growing numbers of dissident families. And he established an alternative view on the whole joint venture by emphasizing the initiative role of Wilhelm Ostwald and Karl Liebknecht: "Besides confronting the privileged position of the church, the church secession movement had the benefit to mitigate the antagonism between proletarians and bourgeoisie."[99]

Lehmann-Rußbüldt's evaluation remained the only truly positive one which makes it highly questionable if the achieved cooperation of bourgeois and proletarian freethinkers would have been stable beyond the summer of 1914, when the secularist networks had reached the climax of their activities. This high productivity and the ongoing colonization of public debates under the auspices of secularism exhausted the network's resources. A downshift of public engagement, publicity, and thematic expansion of freethought seemed an inevitable consequence preempted by the breakdown of any activities because of the war.

Church secession appeared as an issue that could have been skipped: the linkage to active politics failed. And although church membership became a public concern, the target was missed. While gaining discursive power was an aim for monists and their milieu, it was not a central goal for the social democrat atheists. This divergence also manifested on the level of members. While membership in the several bourgeois associations stagnated, the numbers of proletarian freethinkers kept growing – Konrad Beißwanger, thus, concluded already in 1909: "The bourgeois movement is dying, while the proletarian movement is flourishing."[100]

Conclusion

In the end, the activists of church secession failed in their attempts to form a mass movement. Most Germans continued to be part of the established Catholic or Protestant churches – or the larger minority groups like the Jewish communities or the Christian free churches. Freethought, for its part, remained in a minoritarian position. Yet, and despite this failure, the *Komitee Konfessionslos* succeeded in other aspects. Its members proved influential in the freethought movement and in the German society on the eve of the First World War. They successfully raised the awareness of the public that church membership was not a fixed dimension of the individual identity, but a chosen personal aspect of the social

99 Otto Lehmann-Rußbüldt, "Die Liebschaft zwischen Polizei und Kirche und anderes," *Der Dissident* 8, no. 1 (April 1914): 6.

100 Konrad Beißwanger, "Die freigeistigen Strömungen in Deutschland und die proletarischen Freidenker," *Der Atheist* 5, no. 43 (October 1909): 338.

sphere – with non-belonging as an equivalent possibility. Consequently, their agitation triggered the public attention for the confessional bias of civil rights and the need to participate in public agency. This does not mean that secularists would have achieved civil equality for all citizens. But the debates launched by the *Komitee Konfessionslos* were one reason for the efforts to codify civil equality independent of religion in the Weimar Constitution and in subsequent constitutional debates.

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Antoine Mandret-Degeilh

A Secular Avant-Garde? About the Unknown Freethinker Roots of Today's French Civil Baptism

Civil baptism in contemporary France is a family ceremony celebrated at the town hall. During the ceremony, two persons — generally a woman and a man chosen among family members or, in less traditional milieus, among friends — are appointed to be godparents for a child. In this, civil baptism equals its Catholic counterpart.[1] The ceremony generally takes place in the wedding room and resembles the staging of a civil marriage: the parents and their child are sitting on the chairs for the bridal couple, the godparents on the chairs for the witnesses, while the relatives sit behind them. First, the celebrant – the mayor or any other town councilor – welcomes the participants and holds a speech referring to the fundamental values of the Republic – "liberté, égalité, fraternité," mostly. Then he asks the consent of the parents and the godparents and invites them to sign a certificate. After the public ceremony, the participants share a private feast – like it is the case for any other family ritual – where they generally present the child or the parents with gifts. Though nowadays civil baptism's performance is neither authorized nor prohibited but left to the discretion of mayors – which means that the issued certificate has no legal value – it has strongly developed in France during the last three decades.[2]

In their large majority, today's parents, in opting for civil baptism, do not pursue anticlerical or anti-Catholic goals. Most of them were raised as Catholics and socialized to the norms and values of Catholic godparenthood. However, they got slowly alienated from Catholicism and ceased to visit church services. After having become parents themselves, they still aim to create a spiritual kinship for their child, though at the lowest possible symbolic cost, which is why they prefer civil baptism over the Catholic ritual. The administrative procedures, to them, seem less burdensome at the town hall compared to the church: these parents find it easier to simply present a photocopy of the godparents' identity

1 See Vincent Gourdon, "L'Affirmation d'un rite familial: Premiers résultats d'une enquête sur les baptêmes civils auprès des municipalités de Charente-Maritime," *Ecrits d'Ouest*, no. 13 (2005): 169 – 198.

2 On today's legal practice of civil baptism, see Antoine Mandret-Degeilh, "Gouverner par le rite: Socio-histoire des rites d'institution municipaux autour de la parenté en France, au miroir de la situation en Allemagne (1789 – 1989)" (PhD diss., Sciences Po Paris, 2015), 403 – 413.

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card than their baptismal certificate, all the more so as many parents do not want to commit themselves to having their child attend catechism classes in the years after the baptism.[3] This is not to say that these parents would be hostile to religion or act out of an ideologically charged motivation. Rather, they mostly feel indifferent towards the Catholicism they were raised in. Interestingly – and counterintuitively to the aforesaid – when turning to the history of civil baptism, strong secularist influences become evident, in particular the successful but widely unknown contribution of early twentieth-century French freethinkers to today's French civil baptism. Also, the "banal" nationalism in civil baptism is striking, as political symbols such as flags and tricolor objects were and still are used today during the ceremony.[4]

This chapter aims to trace the freethinker roots of French civil baptism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is based on research conducted in municipal archives (notably in Bobigny, a town located in the suburbs of Paris, one of the first and the most known communist municipalities in France from the interwar period to the early twenty-first century),[5] as well as on academic literature on the freethought movement in France.[6] In the first part, the invention of freethinker baptism and its extension to other political groups in the twentieth century will be addressed. The second part will show that freethinkers continue to inspire civil baptism down to the present day despite the decline of freethinker baptism since the interwar period.

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3 See Antoine Mandret-Degeilh, "Sous l'égide et la protection de l'autorité civile et républicaine: Dimensions politiques et sociétales de la pratique contemporaine du baptême républicain" (MA thesis, Sciences Po Paris, 2007), 82–125.

4 On the concept of banal nationalism, see Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995).

5 See Annie Fourcaut, *Bobigny, banlieue rouge* (Paris: Les Editions ouvrières & Presses de la FNSP, 1986); and Tyler Stovall, *The Rise of the Paris Red Belt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

6 On the history of freethinkers in France in general, see Jacqueline Lalouette, "La Libre Pensée," in *Le XIXe siècle: Science, politique et tradition*, ed. Isabelle Poutrin (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1995), 509–521; Jacqueline Lalouette, *La Libre Pensée en France, 1848–1940* (Paris: Albin Michel, [2]2001); and Maurice Agulhon, "La Libre-Pensée," in *La France d'un siècle à l'autre: 1914–2000*, ed. Jean-Pierre Rioux and Jean-François Sirinelli (Paris: Hachette littératures, 2002), 319–330.

The History of Civil Baptism in France and its Freethinker Pioneers

To some extent, the historical French freethinkers can be considered the inventors of today's French civil baptism. However, there have been – in the end unsuccessful – attempts to introduce secular baptisms prior to these freethinker initiatives of the late nineteenth century. During the French Revolution, for instance, so-called "civic" baptisms were celebrated: in 1792, and in the course of the secularist turn during the revolution,[7] the parish registers had been transferred from the parishes to the communes.[8] This created some confusion on the side of the citizens who were used to the fact that, until then, the birth registration of a child was equivalent to the celebration of its religious (Catholic) baptism. The first birth certificates issued by the civic municipalities did not fail to testify to this confusion: many of them contained the word "baptême" ("baptism").[9] In addition to this confusing reference, there also was some frustration with the lacking ritualization of the new civil registration practices.[10] It is in this context that the first projects of "civic baptisms" – aimed at ritualizing the new civil custom – were born in 1792 and the years following.[11] Civic baptism reached its first peak in the second half of the 1790s in the so-called "cultes révolution-

7 On this secularist turn, see Mona Ozouf, "Déchristianisation," in *Dictionnaire critique de la Révolution Française*, ed. François Furet and Mona Ozouf (Paris: Flammarion, 1988), 50–62; Claude Langlois, "Politique et religion," in *Histoire de la France religieuse: Du roi très chrétien à la laïcité républicaine*, ed. Philippe Joutard (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 108–144; and Jacqueline Lalouette, *La Séparation des Églises et de l'État: Genèse et développement d'une idée, 1789–1905* (Paris: Seuil, 2005). On the secularization of rituals during the revolution, see Antoine Mandret-Degeilh, "Gouverner par le rite: Socio-histoire des rites d'institution municipaux autour de la parenté en France, au miroir de la situation en Allemagne (1789–1989)" (PhD diss., Sciences Po Paris, 2015), 80–99 (on marriage); 345 (on confirmation); and 338–339 (on funerals).

8 See Marcel Garaud and Romuald Szramkiewicz, *La Révolution Française et la famille: Histoire générale du droit privé français (de 1789 à 1804)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1978), 39–42.

9 Louis Pérouas, *Léonard, Marie, Jean et les autres: Les Prénoms en Limousin depuis le millénaire* (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1984), 133.

10 On these difficulties, see Louis-Marie de la Révellière-Lépeaux, *Réflexions sur le culte, sur les cérémonies civiles et sur les fêtes nationales: Lues à l'Institut le 12 floréal, an 5 de la République, dans la séance de la classe des sciences morales et politiques* (Paris: H.-J. Jansen, 1796), 22–23.

11 The historical predecessors of civil baptism are studied in: Albert Mathiez, *Les Origines des cultes révolutionnaires (1789–1792)* (Paris: Société nouvelle de librairie et d'édition, 1904), 133–136.

naires" ("revolutionary religions"),[12] including ideas such as "theophilanthropy"[13] that were supposed to replace the Catholic religion. These second-generation "civic," "patriotic," or "constitutional" baptisms were conceived as counter-rituals to the religious predecessor.[14] Though, with the failure of the revolution and the Restoration period, civic baptism remained a very marginal practice and finally disappeared completely during the early nineteenth century.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, multiple new attempts were made to set up secular baptisms on regular grounds. French freemasons with their strong enlightened and civic tradition, for instance, organized such celebrations for their children, whereas a workers' society in Lyon, the *Voraces de Vaise,*[15] celebrated similar ceremonies in the early 1850s.[16] These local initiatives, again, remained marginal and declined quickly. Thus, when French freethinkers in search for new provocative means of collective action started to systematically advocate for civil baptisms in the late nineteenth century, they could hardly rely on an already known and implemented tradition, even though there were similar attempts to set up secular baptisms in socialist circles at the same time.[17] Still, the French freethought movement became the main promotor of these new baptisms in France, now called "civil" baptisms. The diffusion of civil baptism in the freethought movement occurred in several stages that reflect the history of the freethought movement in France.[18]

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12 Serge Bianchi, "Cultes révolutionnaires," in *Dictionnaire historique de la Révolution Française*, ed. Albert Soboul (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, [3]2004), 312–315.

13 "Theophilanthropy" was a religion established in the second half of the 1790s, consisting of a set of individual practices and public festivals. Two of its most important beliefs were the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. In the late 1790s, "theophilanthropy" was challenged by the so-called "decadary religion," a semi-official religion celebrating festivals every "décadi" (the day of rest in the 10-day week of the republican calendar).

14 See Adeline Trombert, "Les Baptêmes de la fraternité: Eléments pour une sociologie historique des parrainages civils et républicains" (MA thesis, Sciences Po Grenoble, 2000), 32–36; and Vincent Gourdon, "Les Révolutions du baptême en France de 1789 à nos jours" (Habilitation thesis, Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2014), 95–108.

15 Vaise is a town quarter of Lyon. The term "voraces" ("voracious") was a corruption of the word "dévoirant" that sounded like "dévorant" ("devouring") but actually derived from the expression "devoir mutuel" ("mutual duty").

16 On civic baptism conducted by freemasons, see Gourdon, "Les Révolutions du baptême en France de 1789 à nos jours," 614. On early proletarian civic baptism, see Jacqueline Lalouette, *La Libre Pensée en France*, 368.

17 See Trombert, "Les Baptêmes de la fraternité," 40.

18 After the first French freethought associations were founded in the 1850s, the movement kept growing slowly in the 1860s and 1870s before experiencing a boom in the three following decades. In the interwar period, it started to decline and almost disappeared after the Second

It was during the 1870s when French freethinkers started to work on their projects to replace religious by secular rituals. Charles Fauvety's idea of an unitarian church inspired by the British and US-American unitarian projects from previous decades could be mentioned here.[19] He proposed an "adoption ceremony" as the secular equivalent of Catholic baptism. Fauvety, a deistic freethinker and a freemason, took his inspiration from the revolutionary, theophilanthropist counter-rituals, as well as from those of the so-called "decadary religion."[20] Subsequently, the practice of civil baptism slowly gained wider recognition during the 1880s: freethinker baptisms were reported in many different places such as in Paris in 1880, in Carcassonne at the same time, in Perpignan in 1882, and in Lyon in 1886.[21] During the next two decades, the custom finally experienced a huge upsurge and took on institutionalized forms:[22] freethinker local societies in charge specifically of the organization and the celebration of civil baptisms were founded in several cities such as in the eighteenth arrondissement of Paris in 1893, or in the Paris region (in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Neuilly-en-Thelle, and Alfortville).[23] Elsewhere in France – such as in the Lille, Charente, Limousin, Bordeaux, and Dijon regions – regular freethinker local societies celebrated civil baptisms as well.[24] The First World War brought a stop to this practice.[25] Between

World War. More than a hundred local societies were established all over France in the late nineteenth century, not only in the Paris region, but also in the Lille, Limoges, and Dijon regions, etc. They were mainly composed of men aged between 30 and 50 years who stemmed mostly from popular milieus, many of them teachers. The freethought movement largely contributed to the separation of church and state in France prior to the First World War. See Lalouette, *La Libre Pensée en France*.

19 The projects were called unitarian because they opposed the concept of trinity. See André Combes, "Charles Fauvety et la religion laïque," in *Libre pensée et religion laïque en France: De la fin du Second Empire à la fin de la Troisième République, Journée d'étude tenue à l'Université de Paris XII, 10 novembre 1979*, ed. Centre de Recherche et de Documentation des Institutions Chrétiennes (Strasbourg: CERDIC publications, 1980), 41.

20 Pierre Pierrard, *L'Église et les ouvriers en France: 1840–1940* (Paris: Hachette, 1984), 468.

21 See Lalouette, *La Libre Pensée en France*, 369; and Joseph Ramoneda, *La République concordataire et ses curés dans les Pyrénées-Orientales, 1870–1905* (Perpignan: Presses Universitaires de Perpignan, 2011), 78.

22 See Lalouette, *La Libre Pensée en France*, 369.

23 Documented in ibid.; Gourdon, "Les Révolutions du baptême en France de 1789 à nos jours," 619; and Trombert, "Les Baptêmes de la fraternité," 49–50.

24 See for Lille: Yves-Marie Hilaire, *Histoire du Nord-Pas-de-Calais: De 1900 à nos jours* (Toulouse: Privat, 1982), 470; for Charente: Emile Papillon, "Charente: Dignac," *Le Libre Penseur du Centre et de l'Ouest: Journal anticlérical de défense socialiste, républicaine et laïque*, June 15, 1908, 6; for Limousin and Bordeaux: Pérouas, *Léonard, Marie, Jean et les autres*, 183; and for Dijon: Dominique Goussot, "Le Baptême républicain," *La Raison* (December 2005): 13.

1870 and the interwar period (which marked the beginning of a general decline of the freethought movement in France), freethinker baptism eventually remained a marginal practice with only a few thousand celebrations, compared to much higher numbers reached by other freethinker practices such as civil funerals.[26]

It should be stressed, though, that freethinker celebrations were never merely rituals but always had a political side, with the secularists publicly participating in civil baptisms – sometimes forming a large audience of several hundred people (as in Saint-Denis in 1876), most of them male freethinkers coming from the neighboring local societies, striving to stand up for their secularist agenda.[27] Anticlerical speeches given during the ceremony added to this politicized aspect of civil baptism: for instance, in 1895 in Waziers (Northern France), the celebrant denounced "l'effroyable mortalité des trois-quarts des nouveaux-nés qui, sans pouvoir se défendre, sont forcés de subir les douches abrutissantes de notre prostitutée-sainte mère l'église" ("the frightful mortality of three-quarters of the newborns who, without being able to defend themselves, are forced to undergo the stultifying showers of our prostitute-holy mother church.")[28] This was enforced even more by provocative ritual sequences such as toasts to the dechristianization of France[29] and by the intense use of political symbols, namely revolutionary and republican ones including the Phrygian cap, tricolor flags, and the singing of the Marseillaise[30] next to specific freethinker symbols such as crowns of rosehips and red cockades.[31] Civil baptism, thus, alongside other practices like civil funerals, appeared as a means of a secularist freethinker repertoire

25 On the impact of freethinker practices in prewar times, see Gourdon, "Les Révolutions du baptême en France de 1789 à nos jours," 616. On the caesura of the First World War, see Lalouette, *La Libre Pensée en France*, 370.

26 On the marginal success of civil baptism, see Louis Pérouas, *Refus d'une religion, religion d'un refus: En Limousin rural, 1880–1940* (Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1985), 177; and Lalouette, *La Libre Pensée en France*, 371. On the history of civil funerals in France, see Jacqueline Lalouette, "Les Baptêmes républicains de la Révolution à nos jours," in *Accueillir le nouveau-né, d'hier à aujourd'hui*, ed. Marie-France Morel (Toulouse: Erès, 2013), 295.

27 See Trombert, "Les Baptêmes de la fraternité," 44.

28 *Bulletin mensuel de la Fédération Française de Libre Pensée* (December 1895): 573.

29 See Trombert, "Les Baptêmes de la fraternité," 41.

30 On anticlericalism underlying secularist ceremonies, see Lalouette, *La Libre Pensée en France*, 373. On the Phrygian cap, see Lalouette, "Les Baptêmes républicains de la Révolution à nos jours," 297; on the tricolor flag: Ramoneda, *La République concordataire et ses curés dans les Pyrénées-Orientales,* 78.

31 On red cockades, see Lalouette, *La Libre Pensée en France*, 376; and Trombert, "Les Baptêmes de la fraternité," 44 (on the Marseillaise: 47).

of politicized collective action against religion in general and Catholicism in particular.[32]

At the same time, freethinker civil baptism could be considered a secular kinship ritual with godparenthood at its core, as became apparent in the course of the celebrations: not only were the godparents asked to give their consent to bring up their godchildren in the values cherished by freethinkers, starting with "le culte de l'honneur et de la raison" ("the religion of honor and reason"), but this secularist moral element was enforced even more by the speech of the freethinker celebrant. He was usually the leader of the freethinker local society or a famous politician and member of the local society. In his speech, the celebrant often referred to the vital role of the godparents for the children's education.[33] Even though this may seem paradoxical, freethinker civil baptisms seem to have borrowed from Catholic traditions, which is further underscored by the young age in which the children received their baptism both in Catholicism and in the freethinker ritual. Also striking is the persistence of practices such as the use of sugared almonds and white robes imported from Catholic traditions.[34] This suggests that freethinker civil baptism was also a kinship ritual answering to a social demand of secularists.

Civil Baptism in French Communist Cities of the Interwar Period and in the Mid-Twentieth Century

After the decline of freethinker civil baptisms, a new type of secular baptism arose during the interwar years. These so-called "red baptisms" were increasingly celebrated in French municipalities, most of them newly communist[35] and mainly located in the "red belt" of the Paris region: Aubervilliers, Aulnay-sous-Bois, Bagnolet, Bobigny, Montreuil, Ivry-sur-Seine, Villejuif, Vitry-sur-Seine, and Le Kremlin-Bicêtre.[36] For the first time, municipal administrations

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32 See Jacqueline Lalouette, "Les Enterrements civils dans les premières décennies de la Troisième République" *Ethnologie française* 23, no. 2 (1983): 111–128.

33 See Lalouette, *La Libre Pensée en France*, 373; 377.

34 See ibid., 371; 377; Trombert, "Les Baptêmes de la fraternité," 45; and Gourdon, "Les Révolutions du baptême en France de 1789 à nos jours," 211–262.

35 The *Parti communiste français* (French Communist Party) was founded in 1920 by the majority faction of the socialist *Section française de l'internationale ouvrière* (French Section of the Workers' International, SFIO).

36 On red baptisms in general, see Mandret-Degeilh, "Gouverner par le rite," 170. For Aubervilliers, Aulnay-sous-Bois, Bagnolet, Bobigny, and Montreuil, see Lalouette, *La Libre Pensée en*

took charge of the preparation of secular baptisms and their celebration, namely by the mayor (or town councilors) at the town hall, sometimes supported by the members of the declining local freethinker societies, for instance in Avion (Northern France). These rituals became an instrument of the (anticlerical) religious policies of the French communist municipalities, as the speeches held by the mayors during these celebrations indicate.[37] In the course of one of these ceremonies performed in Bobigny in 1934, a collective baptism of twenty children ended up in a procession to the church during which parodies of Catholics songs were sung.[38] Also, the intense use of communist symbols is striking, as the cover page of Bobigny's first register from 1926 shows. (Fig. 1)

While civil baptism in the interwar period became an institutionalized practice that was implemented from top-down in communist cities, militant and political bottom-up uses and re-appropriations of these "red baptisms" also occurred. Originally, the new civil baptisms were set up for the whole population of the communist cities, yet eventually they attracted a specific militant audience. The political affinity of those families opting for a civil baptism in communist cities was revealed by their place of residence: many communist cities surrounding Paris, including Bobigny and Ivry-sur-Seine, welcomed families coming from the arrondissements of Northern Paris – the main setting of the Paris Commune of 1871. These families chose politically explicit first names for their children such as Trotsky, Lénine, and Jaurès, traceable, e. g., in Bobigny in the interwar years. Also the days they picked to celebrate the baptisms stand out: Labor Day, May Day, or the Bastille Day, the French national holiday closely aligned with the revolution.[39] The small number of celebrations confirms that we deal here with a specific public: in Bobigny, for instance, only 39 civil baptisms (of 84 children) were celebrated between 1925 and 1938.[40]

No other than the freethinker baptisms, "red baptisms" could also be considered a secular kinship ritual responding to a (secular) social demand that borrowed from Catholic traditions. Again, the age of the children civilly baptized

France, 370. For Ivry-sur-Seine, Villejuif, Vitry-sur-Seine, and Le Kremlin-Bicêtre, see Etienne Fouilloux and Claude Langlois, "Les Parrainages civils à Ivry-sur-Seine au XXe siècle," in *Libre pensée et religion laïque en France: De la fin du Second Empire à la fin de la Troisième République, Journée d'étude tenue à l'Université de Paris XII, 10 novembre 1979*, ed. Centre de Recherche et de Documentation des Institutions Chrétiennes (Strasbourg: CERDIC publications, 1980), 194; 203; 206; 210.

37 See Mandret-Degeilh, "Gouverner par le rite," 172.

38 Ibid.

39 See ibid., 175–176 (for Bobigny); and Fouilloux and Langlois, "Les Parrainages civils à Ivry-sur-Seine au XXe siècle," 202–203 (for Ivry-sur-Seine).

40 See Mandret-Degeilh, "Gouverner par le rite," 174.

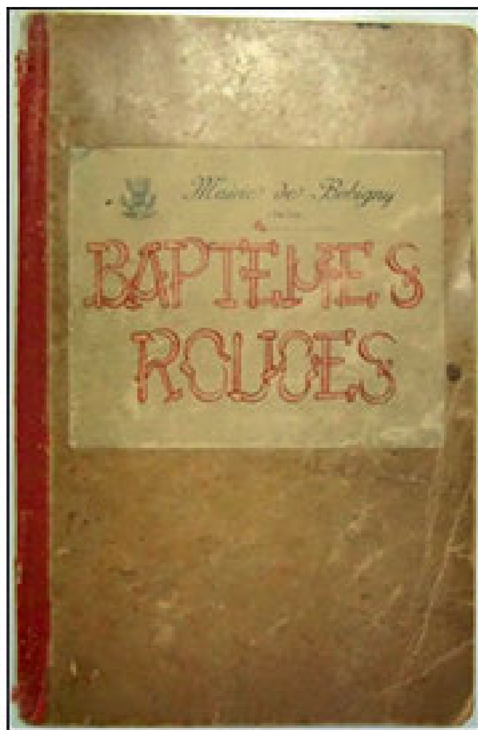

Figure 1: *Baptêmes Rouges*, front cover (Municipal Archives of Bobigny, W 990).

was very similar to the age of Catholic children: in Ivry-sur-Seine, 65 % of them were less than three years old when receiving civil baptism in the interwar period. The number of godparents and their gender (one man and one woman) likewise recalled the Catholic practice. In the interwar years, all 84 children in Bobigny had a male and a female godparent.[41]

The Second World War neither put an end to the municipal practice of civil baptism nor marked a break in its development. On the contrary, civil baptisms kept on flourishing in communist cities, even though, from the 1970s on, their strong anticlerical character decisive for the secular baptisms until then began to weaken, as is illustrated by the less controversial speeches held during the ceremonies, and the less polemical terminology used to refer to the practice. The expression "red baptism," for instance, disappeared at that time. Even the

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41 See ibid., 176 – 178; and Fouilloux and Langlois, "Les Parrainages civils à Ivry-sur-Seine au XXe siècle," 199.

members of the few remaining freethinker local societies that continued to support the celebration of civil baptism took less and less part in the ceremonies, as was the case in the aforementioned city of Avion.[42] Several reasons can be put forward to explain this observable turning point of the 1970s and 1980s in the communist practice of civil baptism, namely the simultaneous transformations of municipal communism echoing the beginning electoral decline of the French Communist Party and the collapse of the French freethought movement.[43]

Once depoliticized, the practice of civil baptism in communist cities stretched out to a wider public. In Bobigny, for instance, 362 children were civilly baptized between 1971 and 1990, compared to only 59 children between 1945 and 1970.[44] The profile of the families opting for a civil baptism also changed, as becomes evident by the growing numbers of single-parent families: in Bobigny, around 25 % of the civilly baptized children grew up in single-parent households towards the end of the 1980s. This suggests that new uses of civil baptism in terms of kinship were developing at that time. In the latter case, civil baptism could have been a means to compensate for the absence of the missing parent (generally the father), creating instead symbolic kinship between a child and two adults and thus ceased to be a secularist activist practice. Consequently, civil baptism started to resemble even stronger Catholic baptisms, be it concerning the seasonality of the practice (around 40 % of the celebrations took place in April, May, and June), the age of the godchildren (more than 75 % of the children civilly baptized in Bobigny in the 1970s and 1980s were less than one year old), or the selection of godparents from within the family (as is illustrated by the strong patronymic homonymy between parents and godparents in several cases).[45]

In other words, French civil baptism became a family ritual at that time. The reasons for this de-politicization of the practice in "red" cities from the 1970s onwards lie not only in the municipalities and their development, but were also enforced by their citizens and their changing social relations and needs. This illustrates the growing secularization of the French society in the twentieth century.[46]

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42 See Mandret-Degeilh, "Gouverner par le rite," 380 – 382.

43 On communism, see Jean Ranger, "Le Déclin du Parti communiste français," *Revue française de science politique* 36, no. 1 (1986): 46 – 63. On freethinkers during these years, see Lalouette, *La Libre Pensée en France*, 398.

44 See Mandret-Degeilh, "Gouverner par le rite," 386.

45 Ibid., 388 – 393.

46 On the theories of secularization, see Jean Baubérot, "Les seuils de laïcisation dans l'Europe latine et la recomposition du religieux dans la modernité tardive," in *La modernité religieuse en perspective comparée: Europe latine – Amérique latine*, ed. Jean-Pierre Bastian (Paris: Karthala,

The Extension of Civil Baptism since the 1970s

Another striking fact of these decades is the spreading of civil baptism to non-communist French municipalities previously not familiar with this practice, especially in small villages in rural areas.[47] Contrary to the earlier development, it was not about a top-down institutionalization of civil baptism but about its bottom-up diffusion, even though this new phenomenon remained marginal, representing on average less than 0.1 celebrations a year per 1,000 inhabitants.[48] Most of the municipalities that celebrated a civil baptism for the first time in the 1970s and 1980s actually were first informed about the existence of this practice upon request by their citizens, who had heard of it and now wanted to celebrate it, too. These parents refused Catholic baptism and searched for a secular birth ritual or private celebration to appoint godparents for their children in a ceremonious way.[49] Yet these new civil baptisms were not as apolitical as they seemed at first glance: even if the new practice spread mainly from the bottom-up, a politicization of civil baptism on the side of certain, mostly left-wing municipalities can be traced, for example in medium-sized French cities or even larger cities, such as La Rochelle in Western France, where civil baptism was connected to a municipal project to promote citizenship. But a politicization recalling the culture wars of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with their strong confrontation of clericalism and anticlericalism[50] also took place on the side of small, mostly right-wing municipalities in rural areas. They contributed to the political charging of civil baptism by refusing to approve the request of their citizens which they took as an anticlerical provocation.[51] Civil baptism, finally, underwent politicization also from the side of a minority of parents. They considered the ritual as a means to promote the French republican values or to demonstrate their support of the concept of the separation of church and state, even if – other than in previous decades – their actions remained an individual initiative unrelated to the freethought movement or any other political movement. This is

2001), 16 – 28; and Detlef Pollack, "Varieties of Secularization Theories and their Indispensable Core," *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* 90, no. 1 (2015): 60 – 79.

47 See Mandret-Degeilh, "Gouverner par le rite," 414 – 420.

48 Ibid., 418.

49 See Sylvie Garnier, "Les Baptêmes civils dans l'Isère 1970 – 1985" (MA thesis, Institut d'études politiques Grenoble, 1985).

50 See James McMillan, "'Priest hits girl': On the front line in the 'war of the two Frances'," in *Culture Wars: Secular–Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 77 – 101.

51 See Mandret-Degeilh, "Gouverner par le rite," 426; 428.

not to say that all parents opting for civil baptism in non-communist municipalities in the 1970s and 1980s turned the practice into a political act: for most of them, civil baptism remained an uncomplicated kinship ritual resembling the Catholic customs.[52]

In the following decades, the practice continued its road to success, spreading to other communes by word-of-mouth recommendation and upon request from the citizens. In the 2000s, civil baptism even experienced a particular boom due to the growing media attention the ceremony generated in local newspapers and because of the continuing religious de-institutionalization that caused more and more parents to seek alternatives to Christian baptism.[53] At the same time, parliamentary initiatives strived to enforce this trend by codifying civil baptism – all in all, with nearly a dozen bills and proposed amendments.[54] Even if none of these attempts have been successful, the fact that some of them were proposed by right-wing parliamentarians, together with the fact that many right-wing municipalities – such as Nice, Châlons-en-Champagne, and Maisons-Laffitte – now celebrate civil baptisms, reveals the gradual trivialization of the ritual. It primarily remains a kinship ritual that lost its marginality:[55] as many as 10 % of the 37,000 French communes have celebrated at least one civil baptism since 2002. The proportion of children receiving a civil baptism could be estimated around 3.5 % at the beginning of the 2000s.[56]

Freethinkers as the Entrepreneurs of French Civil Baptism

The previous considerations have clearly indicated that freethinkers were pioneers in developing and furthering the practice of civil baptism at the turn of the twentieth century. However, the analysis seems to suggest their absence

52 See ibid., 425; 433 – 440; and Caroline Bonenfant, "La Cérémonie du baptême civil dans le Toulousain depuis les années 1970" (MA thesis, Université Toulouse 2, 1997), 110.
53 See Mandret-Degeilh, "Sous l'égide et la protection de l'autorité civile et républicaine," 129 – 137.
54 See ibid., 26; and Gourdon, "Les Révolutions du baptême en France de 1789 à nos jours," 619.
55 Mandret-Degeilh, "Sous l'égide et la protection de l'autorité civile et républicaine," 79 – 81; and Mandret-Degeilh, "Le Baptême républicain, un baptême catholique comme les autres," 477 – 481.
56 See Mandret-Degeilh, "Sous l'égide et la protection de l'autorité civile et républicaine," 43; and Gourdon, "Les Révolutions du baptême en France de 1789 à nos jours," 627.

from the following stages in the history of civil baptism. This impression is misleading because freethinkers were actually not only the first to institutionalize civil baptism but they also continued to be their entrepreneurs throughout the twentieth century.

Even though "red baptisms" had, at first sight, nothing to do with the civil baptisms promoted by freethinkers of the beginning twentieth century – notably because the ritual was now a strictly municipal practice and because these civil baptisms were not, at least theoretically, reserved for a militant public –, the fact remains that there were visible links between freethinker baptisms and "red baptisms." Indeed, many celebrations of civil baptism took place in communist cities in the interwar years on the initiative of declining local freethinker societies which had convinced the communist mayors to take over the former freethinker practice. In Bagnolet, a commune located in the Paris suburbs, two freethought organizations, the *Union des Libres Penseurs Révolutionnaires* (Union of the Revolutionary Freethinkers) and the *Association des Travailleurs sans Dieu* (Association of the Godless Workers), helped institutionalizing civil baptism on a municipal level after the First World War.[57] Some of these freethought organizations also moved to other cities to propagate the secular ritual, such as in Bobigny, where a team of the freethinker *Enfants sans Dieu* (Godless Children) coming from Bagnolet contributed to the introduction of civil baptism by providing the musical backdrop of the ceremony, for instance.[58] In many other communist cities, without freethinkers necessarily being associated with the implementation of the new "red baptisms," the municipalities still sought inspiration by turning to the practice of freethinker baptisms and adopting some of their customs, e. g. issuing the same certificates.[59]

The connection between freethinkers and some communist municipalities was further facilitated because many local officials such as Jules Coutant from Ivry-sur-Seine were also members of freethinker societies and, thus, were used to taking part in freethinker baptisms, sometimes held speeches, or issued certificates.[60] Prior to the First World War, some municipalities even offered the re-

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57 See Jacqueline Lalouette, "Communisme et libre pensée durant l'entre-deux-guerres: L'Union des Libres Penseurs Révolutionnaires de France et l'Association des Travailleurs sans Dieu," in *Des communistes en France (années 1920 – années 1960)*, ed. Jacques Girault (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2002), 437.

58 See ibid., 437–438; and Trombert, "Les Baptêmes de la fraternité," 61.

59 See Pierre Bonte, *Bonjour, monsieur le maire: Le Livre d'or des communes de France* (Paris: La table ronde, 1965), 286.

60 See Fouilloux and Langlois, "Les Parrainages civils à Ivry-sur-Seine au XXe siècle," 200–201; and Mandret-Degeilh, "Gouverner par le rite," 167.

ception rooms of their town halls to local freethinker societies for their celebrations, as is verifiably, e.g., in Pollestres in Southern France, in Inval-Boiron in the Somme region, and in Limoges.[61] Although the French freethought movement slowly ceased to exist after the Second World War, many of the "surviving" freethinkers sought to support the introduction of the practice outside communist municipalities in the 1970s and 1980s. Citizens faced with the refusal of their request for civil baptism by the major shared this denial with the public, reporting about it in the local press: having read these reports, local freethinkers contacted them in several cases, proposing to refer them to another municipality.[62]

As already mentioned, local officials in many of those municipalities hosting a civil baptism in the 1970s and 1980s for the first time were unaware of this ritual and its specifics. The first concern of these officials was therefore often of a more practical nature. They wanted to know if and under which conditions they could celebrate such a ceremony and above all how they could or should proceed.[63] Knowing or being informed about the existence of a freethinker precedent, some municipalities directly turned to the remaining *Fédération Nationale de la Libre Pensée* (National Freethought Federation) whose members – mostly elderly people nostalgic about the golden age of the freethought movement they experienced in the interwar period as young activists – provided them with material for the organization and celebration of civil baptism, even though neither the municipality nor the citizens asking for this celebration were freethinkers.[64] In other cases, officials approached their colleagues in those communist cities already offering this celebration. Municipalities such as Aubervilliers, Genevilliers, and Bezons subsequently advised them a model of celebration composed of a speech and a certificate referring to freethinker values and symbols and, by this, reviving central aspects of the former freethinker baptisms.[65] In consequence, the speeches held during these new civil baptisms of the 1970s and 1980s by mayors who believed they were following the correct procedure, as well as the certificates issued at the end of these celebrations, carried a freethinker handwriting and alluded to the "culte de l'honneur et de la raison"

61 See for Pollestres: Ramoneda, *La République concordataire et ses curés dans les Pyrénées-Orientales*, 78. For Inval-Boiron and the Somme-region: Trombert, "Les Baptêmes de la fraternité," 46 – 47. For Limoges: Pérouas, *Refus d'une religion, religion d'un refus*, 176 – 177.

62 See Mandret-Degeilh, "Gouverner par le rite," 416.

63 Ibid., 429 – 432.

64 Ibid., 431.

65 See for Genevilliers and Bezons: ibid., 432. For Aubervilliers: Garnier, "Les Baptêmes civils dans l'Isère 1970 – 1985," 45.

(“the worship of honor and reason”).[66] This circle of reference has repeated itself since the new rise of civil baptism in the 2000s, so that the freethinker model outlived until today.

Conclusion

This essay has shown that the contemporary practice of French civil baptism traces back, directly and indirectly, to the freethinker ritual of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, this influence remains unknown to most of those celebrating or attending a civil baptism today. In recent decades, many mayors celebrating civil baptisms have wrongly affirmed that the legal basis for this secular practice would be a revolutionary norm directly associated with the projects of the French Revolution to secularize the registration of births, marriages, and deaths. Some of today’s officials refer to a text dating back to July 13, 1790, others to a law passed on 18 Brumaire, Year II, while still others of those responsible rely on a law passed on 20 Prairial, Year II, for historical legitimacy.[67] These local officials have simply taken up a narrative created by regional press organs, by other poorly informed officials – prefects and bureaucrats from the ministries of justice and of the interior,[68] whom they have consulted about the legal basis of the practice –, as well as, more recently, by private firms. Those firms seek to benefit from the rise of civil baptism in the 2000s: they sell ceremonial speeches or certificates to municipalities and emphasize the supposed revolutionary origin of civil baptism.[69] The local officials in charge of civil baptism do not know that, actually, the practice is not based on any revolutionary text and that it even lacks a legal basis.[70]

This supposed and perpetuated revolutionary origin thus takes on the features of a myth and obscures completely the freethinker origin of the contemporary practice.[71] In fact, the opposite is the case: while there has been a kind of continuity between the freethinker, the communist, and the contemporary practices of civil baptism that have been passed down from generation to generation,

66 Mandret-Degeilh, “Sous l’égide et la protection de l’autorité civile et républicaine,” 71.
67 See Mandret-Degeilh, “Gouverner par le rite,” 411.
68 Ibid., 412.
69 Mandret-Degeilh, “Sous l’égide et la protection de l’autorité civile et républicaine,” 25 – 26; 81.
70 Mandret-Degeilh, “Gouverner par le rite,” 405 – 406.
71 Rachel Guidoni, “Le Parrainage civil: Une pratique française revisitée,” *Ateliers*, no. 27 (2004): 9.

no such continuity can be identified between the revolutionary practice of civic baptism and the freethinker civil baptism. This seems all the more ironic as it was the freethought movement which indirectly contributed to the construction of this revolutionary myth: at the end of the nineteenth century, some freethinkers sought to draw inspiration from the civic baptisms conducted during the French Revolution, relying on the rare testimonies about these marginal initiatives that existed at that time to create an uninterrupted chain of historical tradition. Charles Fauvety's project of a unitary church, Jacqueline Le Sidaner's celebrations in Trégastel, and Emile Noël's initiatives in the Limoges region could be mentioned here.[72]

Today's civil baptisms are the descendants of the so-called "red baptisms" in communist municipalities from the interwar period which directly stem from the freethinker baptisms of the late nineteenth and the beginning twentieth centuries. However, this relation remains unknown to most of those who celebrate or attend a civil baptism nowadays. There are several plausible explanations for this ignorance of the freethinker roots of today's civil baptism. One hypothesis links this lack of knowledge to the difficult situation of the freethought movement in France in the second half of the twentieth century. Its steady decline since the Second World War has increased the ignorance of large parts of the French population.[73] A second reason for this lack of awareness might be the revival of the commemoration of the French Revolution in the French political culture during the last decades. Many Frenchman today are more consensual towards the revolution than they were in the past. The scattered history of freethought in France is no match to counter this renewed powerful radiance of the revolution.[74]

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72 See on the unitary church: Pierrard, *L'Eglise et les ouvriers en France*, 468. See on the celebrations in Trégastel: Trombert, "Les baptêmes de la fraternité," 38. On the initiatives in the Limoges region, see Pérouas, *Refus d'une religion, religion d'un refus*, 176–177.

73 See Lalouette, *La Libre Pensée en France*.

74 See Serge Berstein, "Le Retour de la culture républicaine," *Vingtième Siècle*, no. 44 (1994): 113–120.

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Illustrations

Daniela Haarmann

***Freidenkerei, Libre-pensée, Szabadgondolkodás* – Concepts of Freethinking during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries**

Figure 1: Anthony Collins, *Discours sur la liberté de penser: Ecrit à l'occasion d'une nouvelle secte d'Esprits forts, ou de gens qui pensent librement: Traduit de l'anglois & augmenté d'une lettre d'un médecin arabe* (London: s.l., 1714), front cover.

Figure 2: "Two Ways to Go," in *The Freethinkers' Pictoral Text-Book,* ed. Watson Heston (New York: The Truth Seeker Company, 1896), 63.

Barbara Wagner

Secularity in the New State: The Case of Poland

Figure 1: Henryk Halpern and Antoni Zbikowski, eds, *Ilustrowana encyklopedia* (Lublin: Wolnomyśliciel, 1929), front cover.

Figure 2: Henryk Halpern and Antoni Zbikowski, eds, *Ilustrowana encyklopedia* (Lublin: Wolnomyśliciel, 1929), 59.

Antoine Mandret-Degeilh

A Secular Avant-Garde? About the Unknown Freethinker Roots of Today's French Civil Baptism

Figure 1: *Baptêmes Rouges*, front cover (Municipal Archives of Bobigny, W 990).

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