

Engels:
A Lifetime in the
Service of the Working Class



Internationalist Voice

On 5 August 1895, the working class lost one of its great thinkers. Without Engels, Marx would not have been able to do extraordinary things, and Marxism would not have been able to fulfil its position and role. He was not only a comrade and helper of Marx, but he also played an important part in the communist movement. Vulgar criticisms of Engels, as well as anti-Engelsism, the alleged reformism of Engels and, most importantly, contrasting Engels with Marx, etc., are not new. At best, the anti-Engelsism falls into a kind of bourgeois materialism whose function is to stifle the belief in the class struggle of the proletariat that Engels symbolized¹. For its part, the communist left has defended the unity of the ideas of Marx and Engels. Defending Marxism and Marxists is the duty of the communist left. The political tradition that has fought in defence of Marxism continues to do so.

Friedrich Engels was born on 28 November 1820 to a bourgeois family that was strongly religious and reactionary. Before finishing high school, he dropped out to intern at the family company. Although he never attended university, he soon joined the group of Young Hegelians and was influenced by Feuerbach. Engels's familiarity with the living and working conditions of the workers ignited his rebellious spirit and he left behind the comfort of the bourgeois life through political struggle.

Although Marx and Engels met for the first time in 1842, the meeting between Marx and Engels which took place in 1844 led to a very sincere cooperation and friendship between them, which was based on a common belief in the historical role of the proletariat and continued until the end of their lives. The result of that meeting was the joint writing of *The Holy Family*. One of the most important joint works by Engels and Marx is *The German Ideology*, in which the concept of historical materialism is examined

¹ Examining the social performance of critics at social events and their position in workers' class conflicts will reveal the truth of this claim.

in detail. These works were not only a reckoning with the Young Hegelians but also with vulgar materialism.

While working in the family factory in Manchester, Engels was deeply moved by the situation of the working class, and he began research that resulted in a detailed essay entitled “Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy,” in which he criticized the private ownership of the means of production because he believed that it turns human labour into a commodity. This article strongly influenced Marx, because until that point only moral criticisms had been raised and it was the first time that the role of the political economy was emphasized. Engels then published the book *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. Engels was the first to declare that the proletariat is not only a class that is exploited, but the living conditions of the working class force it to fight for its final liberation. Then, he wrote *Principles of Communism*, which formed the initial basis of the manifesto of the Communist Party. Together with Marx, he played a key role in the formation of the Communist League and published *The Communist Manifesto*.²

Along with Marx, Engels showed that the working class and its demands are the product of specific historical conditions and that socialism is the final and necessary result of the growth of productive forces. They emphasized that the liberation of the workers is possible only by the workers themselves, not through the benevolent efforts of generous people.

In 1864, together with Marx, Engels played an active role in the formation of the International Workingmen’s Association (First International). Along with Marx, he had an important part in combatting the destructive performance of Bakunin in the First International. Marx and Engels were always in frequent contact with each other and participated in close political

² For more information on this issue, please see the text, February 1848: The Proletariat Offers Its Own Manifesto as a Social Class for Its Own Emancipation.

and theoretical cooperation, with approximately 1,400 letters exchanged between them.

Without the participation of Engels, either through providing information about the functioning of a capitalist company, through discussion, or through material and spiritual support, the publication of the book *Capital* would not have been possible.³ On 7 May 1867, in his reply to Engels regarding *Capital*, Marx emphasized that without him he would not have been able to complete this extraordinary work:

“Without you, I would never have been able to bring the work to a conclusion, and I can assure you it always weighed like a nightmare on my conscience that you were allowing your fine energies to be squandered and to rust in commerce, chiefly for my sake, and, INTO THE BARGAIN, that you had to share all my petites misères as well.”⁴

After all, the first volume of *Capital* was published in 1867, and Marx emphasizes that without Engels’s sacrifices, the huge work and research for the publication of the three volumes of *Capital* would have been impossible. Marx considered himself indebted to Engels in this regard, noting in a letter:

“[London,] 16 August 1867, 2.0.a.m.

DEAR FRED,

Have just finished correcting the last sheet (49th) of the book. The appendix- Form of Value- in small print, takes up ¼ sheets.

³ Marx and Engels had detailed discussions regarding the theme and content of *Capital*, which have been published separately, and it can be said that Engels played the role of a consultant for Marx in compiling the book.

⁴ Marx & Engels collected works, volume 42, page 371.

Preface ditto returned corrected yesterday. So, this volume is finished. I owe it to you alone that it was possible! Without your self-sacrifice for me I could not possibly have managed the immense labour demanded by the 3 volumes.⁴¹⁸ I EMBRACE YOU, FULL OK THANKS!

Enclosed 2 sheets of corrected proofs.

The £15 received with best thanks.

Salut, my dear, valued friend.

Your K. Marx”⁵

Engels had a strong interest in natural sciences and carried out detailed research in this field, the result of which was the publication of several books. It should be emphasized that Engels’s writings were largely the result of a constant exchange of ideas with Marx. University of Berlin professor Eugen Dühring began to support the Social Democratic Party of Germany and offered a new reading of socialism in contrast to the Marxist form. Marx was busy working and researching on the book *Capital*, which is why Engels was entrusted with the task of responding to Dühring, the result of which was the work *Anti-Dühring*. The books that Engels published after Marx’s death were based on the notes and discussions he had with Marx. *Anti-Dühring* is one of those that others claim to be a departure from Marx’s views. This volume was published during Marx’s lifetime, and the basic question that arises is, why Marx did not criticize this book? Why did Marx allow his revolutionary thought to go astray?

Before continuing the discussion, it is necessary to point out that Engels, like Lenin, had to deal with issues in which he was not an expert in the materialism and criticism of empiricism. For Marxists, philosophy can only be developed based on a historical movement and by learning from such a

⁵ Marx & Engels collected works, volume 42, pages 402-405.

group, and the correct approach is to examine the general and overall attitude of Engels and Lenin, not simply their philosophical position in a particular case.⁶

Following the failure of the Paris Commune, Engels took responsibility for helping Communard refugees in the General Council of the International. Later, he wrote *The Programme of the Blanquist Fugitives from the Paris Commune*, which was a critique of the Blanquist and conspiratorial understanding of the revolution.

Marx had written many books that he was unable to publish during his lifetime, including the second and third volumes of *Capital*. After Marx's death in 1883, Engels undertook the task of organizing and publishing Marx's works. After two years of serious effort, he was able to publish the second volume of *Capital* in 1885, and finally, in 1894, he published the third.

Speculations and discussions regarding the editing of the second and third volumes of *Capital* by Engels have been raised, which there is no opportunity to deal with in this article. The main point is that without Engels it would not have been possible to publish the second and third volumes of *Capital*.

Enemies of Marxists have tried to use Engels's 1895 preface to *The Class Struggles in France* as a pretext and present a pacifist, legalistic image of Engels. This introduction was written by Engels under pressure from the parliamentary group of the Social Democratic Party of Germany. On the one hand, this group convinced Engels that it was necessary to protect the German labour movement from anarchism, and on the other hand, they stated that because the anti-coup bill, which was the continuation of the anti-

⁶ In the article "Lenin as a Philosopher or Lenin as a Revolutionary?" some of these issues have been discussed in relation to Lenin. These issues can be extended to Engels as well. In the rest of the work, Engels will be discussed from the perspective of other communist left tendencies.

socialist laws, was under consideration in the parliament, it was better in the current situation to recommend a non-violent approach. Contrary to false claims, Engels's introduction does not in any way advocate the seizure of political power by the proletariat through electoral means, but deals with the question of parliamentarism and the growth of the party under legal conditions⁷. This introduction contains clauses that are not well formulated. Without Engels's permission or knowledge, the journal *Forward* (Vorwärts), the organ of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, edited by Wilhelm Liebknecht (Karl Liebknecht's father), abridged his introduction at will and published it under the title "How to Make a Revolution," which presented a picture of Engels praising a peaceful and legalistic person. In a letter to Kautsky, Engels expressed his anger and protest over Liebknecht's misuse of his introduction and wrote:

"London, April 1, 1895

Dear Baron,

Postcard received. To my astonishment I see in *Votwärts!* today an extract from my "Introduction," printed without my prior knowledge and trimmed in such a fashion that I appear as a peaceful worshipper of legality at any price. So much the better that the whole thing is to appear now in the *Neue Zeit* so that this disgraceful impression will be wiped out. I shall give Liebknecht a good piece of my mind on that score and also, no matter who they are, to those who gave him the opportunity to misrepresent my opinion without even telling me a word about it ..."⁸

⁷ Engels's introduction and its related issues are examined in detail in the book *Leftism in the Role of Metamorphosed Councilism* within its historical context, and reading the book is recommended.

⁸ Engels To Kautsky.

Only two days after the letter to Kautsky, Engels wrote to Lafargue in a letter dated April 3, 1895:

“Liebknecht has just played me a fine trick. He has taken from my introduction to Marx’s articles on France 1848-50 everything that could serve his purpose in support of peaceful and antiviolen[t] tactics at any price, which he has chosen to preach for some time now, particularly at this juncture when coercive laws are being drawn up in Berlin. But I preach those tactics only for the *Germany of today* and even then *with many reservations*. For France, Belgium, Italy, Austria, such tactics could not be followed as a whole and, for Germany, they could become inapplicable tomorrow.”⁹

Finally, Engels asked Kautsky to publish the entire introduction in its entirety, but apparently *The New Times* (Die Neue Zeit) magazine complied with the restrictions imposed by the government and did not present the full text, which was apparently published in English later in London. Rosa Luxemburg read the version provided in *The New Times* magazine without the entire version of the introduction, so she had criticisms of some of Engels’s statements.¹⁰

In the late 19th century, the German bourgeoisie tolerated universal male suffrage in Germany and a number of socialist representatives entered parliament. This strengthened not only reformism but also the position of the opportunists as well. If in the Communist League and the First International, Marx and Engels faced extreme issues such as Schapperism and had to fight,

⁹ Engels to Lafargue.

¹⁰ Apart from the fact that Rosa Luxemburg had apparently not seen the full text of the preface, it seems that she was unaware of Engels’s supplementary statements on the preface and related topics. Therefore, Rosa Luxemburg, while considering the general content of the introduction a historical document, also criticized some of its arguments.

then Engels encountered reformist tendencies at the end of his life and also had to challenge them.

Let us briefly examine the historical background of the formation of reformism in a country that was one of the most important bases of the labour movement, that is, Germany. Ferdinand Lassalle was one of the Young Hegelians who participated in the 1848 German revolution. He was an admirer of Marx and the Communist League, but he viewed the struggle in a different way. He had a differing opinion to Marx and his followers regarding the state, class struggle, etc. Lassalle believed that by democratizing the government, workers could change society for their own benefit. It was in line with this context that after the 1848 developments, he stated that the revolutionary era was over and workers must change society for their own benefit through legal means. He hoped to communicate with Bismarck and convince him to introduce universal suffrage. Marx and Engels considered Lassalle's expectations and aspirations to be a type of fallacy for the workers and disliked his performance.

In 1863, Lassalle founded the General German Workers' Association (ADAV)¹¹ with the aim of democratizing the government to change society, which brought together different tendencies. Lassalle and his supporters hoped to win universal suffrage by approaching Bismarck. Although Lassalle was killed in a duel on 31 August 1864, the General German Workers' Association continued its activities.

A different view of the struggle within the labour movement in its continuity within the association widened the divergences. Finally, the Marxist wing, led by Babel and Liebknecht, separated from the association and formed the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Germany (SDAP),¹² and declared its goal to abolish the class system and wage labour. In 1871, the German

¹¹ Allgemeine Deutsche Arbeiter-Verein.

¹² Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands.

bourgeoisie recognized universal male suffrage. In 1872, both groups of Lassalle's supporters (ADAV) and Marx's (SDAP) participated in the elections, but failed to achieve great parliamentary success.

In line with the advancement of the labour movement of Bebel, Liebknecht and Bernstein formed a unity congress with the Lasallians in 1875, which subsequently became the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany (SAPD).¹³ The party congress was held in the city of Gotha, and Marx's famous booklet entitled *Criticism of the Gotha Programme* is related to the criticism of the same party's programme. Marx was against his followers joining the movement in which the Lasallians were dominant.

The German Socialist Workers' Party participated in the parliamentary elections of 1877 and achieved some successes. However, Bismarck had anti-socialist laws passed by parliament on 19 October 1878, which continued with several extensions until February 1888. At the same time, Bismarck also created a number of social welfare policies covering unemployment, accident, and disability insurance as well as pensions to weaken the ideological socialists and gain the support of the workers. It can be said that Bismarck formed the first welfare state to disarm the labour movement.

At this stage, the labour parties were social democrats; in other words, the social democratic parties were not equivalent to reformism within the labour movement, which was represented by the supporters of Lassalle and others. According to the historical conditions, Marxists in social democracy had union and parliamentary struggles as the minimum programme on the agenda, and the maximum one, i.e., social revolution, was the ultimate goal of the social democratic parties:

¹³ Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands.

“The social-democracy was formed in direct opposition not only to the anarchists – who thought the revolution was possible at any time – but also to the possibilists and their reformism that considered capitalism as eternal...Whatever the weight of opportunism towards reformism within the social-democratic parties, their program explicitly rejected it. The maximum program of the social-democratic parties was the revolution; the trade union and electoral struggle was essentially the practical means, adapted to the possibilities and the demands of the period, for preparing to realise this aim.”¹⁴

Marx and Engels advocated universal suffrage not only in Germany but wherever possible because social revolution was not yet on the agenda of the proletariat. Marx himself wrote the introduction to the programme of the French Workers’ Party, in which he not only emphasizes the use of universal suffrage as a tool for the use of the proletariat, but also asserts that universal suffrage will become a means for liberation from the deception it has been until this point. In the introduction of the programme of the Workers’ Party, we read:

“Considering,

That this collective appropriation can arise only from the revolutionary action of the productive class – or proletariat - organized in a distinct political party;

That a such an organization must be pursued by all the means the proletariat has at its disposal including universal suffrage which will thus be transformed from the instrument of deception that it has been until now into an instrument of emancipation;

¹⁴ The class nature of the social democracy.

The French socialist workers, in adopting as the aim of their efforts the political and economic expropriation of the capitalist class and the return to community of all the means of production, have decided, as a means of organization and struggle, to enter the elections with the following immediate demands.”¹⁵

Because the Socialist Workers’ Party of Germany was banned due to the anti-socialist law, the members of the party continued to campaign individually. In 1890, the Socialist Workers’ Party of Germany changed its name to the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) at its congress in Halle.

In 1891, the German Social Democratic Party replaced the Erfurt programme with the Gotha one. Engels read the draft of this programme and criticized it, as Marx had critiqued the Gotha programme in 1875. Engels, with some changes, confirmed the general orientation of the programme based on the necessity of the means of production to be social. At the same time, he severely criticized the party’s illusion of a peaceful transition.

In 1889, Engels considered the founding of the new international organization to be premature. To combat opportunism in its various forms, Engels did his best to defeat opportunism at the International Workers Congress in Paris, where he gathered Marxists from 20 countries. Engels played an important role in maintaining the principles of the First International during the formation of the Second International. Unlike anarchists and metamorphosed leftists, who question the class nature of the

¹⁵ The Programme of the Workers Party.

Second International, the communists emphasized the Second International was a workers' organization until its death in 1914.¹⁶

Despite the warnings of Engels, reformism and opportunism, which were pointed out in their historical context, continued to play a destructive role in the Second International, which eventually led to its collapse in 1914.

Historically, the placement of Engels in opposition to Marx, although an issue originating from the 1920s and the Frankfurt School, arose again in the post-Second World War period, when we see the emergence of the critical left and the spread of academic Marxism. In the 11th of Feuerbach's theses, Marx stated that: "Philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways. But the issue is about changing the world." Academic Marxism has forgotten about changing the world and has returned to interpreting the existing one. At the beginning of the article, it was also pointed out that academic Marxism and other forms of sterile Marxism do not play a part in social events and the class conflicts of workers and mostly have a role in philosophical circles involving pedantic interpretation and pontificating.

One of those who played a major role in distinguishing between the thoughts of Marx and Engels was George Lichtheim. He claimed that in Marx's view, critical thought is validated by revolutionary action, but Engels's vision is a system of solid laws from which the inevitability of socialism can be deduced with mathematical certainty. He argued that Marx took the importance of self-conscious activity in making history from Hegel, while Engels adopted determinism from Hegel, and that this deterministic and reductionist attitude

¹⁶ Entering into the discussion of the class nature of the Second International diverts us from the topic of this article. The comrades of the International Communist Current have published an article entitled "The Class Nature of the Social Democracy" which examines this issue and reading it is recommended.

of Engels led him to endorse the reformism of the German Social Democratic Party at the end of his life.

He believed that the Marxism that Engels created started with Engels, was continued by Kautsky, and reached Lenin, and the final result was Stalin's dictatorship. After the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War, the dominant attitude was that Stalinism (Marxism-Leninism), which was against the revolutionary ideas of Marx and Lenin, was considered equivalent to Marxism.

Many texts have been written by the communist left tendencies regarding the historical context and the theme of putting Engels in front of Marx, but one of the most important and valuable articles was published by the comrades of the internationalist communist tendency under the title "200 Years On: Engels and His Revolutionary Contribution," in which they have examined the claims and grounds of anti-Engelsism as well as vulgar criticisms and the alleged reformism of Engels, in addition to the unity of thought of Marx and Engels, etc. The review and conclusion of the comrades are completely acceptable to us, and their publication has made our work easier.

“Without Engels there would have been no Marxism, no Marxist movement. From the launching of the Communist League in 1847, to the founding of the International Workingmen's Association (the First International) in 1864, through to the setting up of the Second International in 1889 – to name but the most familiar political landmarks – the contribution of Engels was indispensable.

During periods of reflux, as in our own contemporary historical experience, it was Engels, despite separations from Marx and the dissolution of organisations, who placed himself at the centre of the struggle. It was he who maintained the vital work of the fraction through a mass of correspondence. After the death of Marx in 1883 it was Engels who lived and breathed the "party spirit", a continuity of

organisational principles and experience transmitted right up to the Third International and thence to the historical present to the only tradition that embodies this political patrimony: the Communist Left.

...

Anti-Engelsism, we have contended, is essentially a peculiar species of idealism. It can be traced to a neo-idealist renaissance that began to emerge towards the beginning of the century, a shift that involved an increasingly radical anti-objectivism. Although its point of departure were real and serious problems in the epistemology of the sciences, in the contingent historical context in which this crisis arose, this was used to reassert a mythological freedom and creativity of 'man', a new subjectivism-voluntarism, that ignored the real conditioning to which actual human beings were subject.

Although Engels offers us no ready made solutions to any of these complicated problems, as in so many important ways he was the point of our origin politically, in the confrontation of these theoretical questions, he is the point of our departure."¹⁷

Engels does not need to be celebrated. He is a communist symbol who served the working class for a lifetime, and a Marxist who symbolized the class struggle. Marxism is not a religion and it needs to be enriched every day to be able to meet the needs of the class struggle and offer the horizon of a classless society. Engels is the point of origin in theoretical and class conflicts and remains alive in class battles.

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¹⁷ 200 Years On: Engels and his Revolutionary Contribution.

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