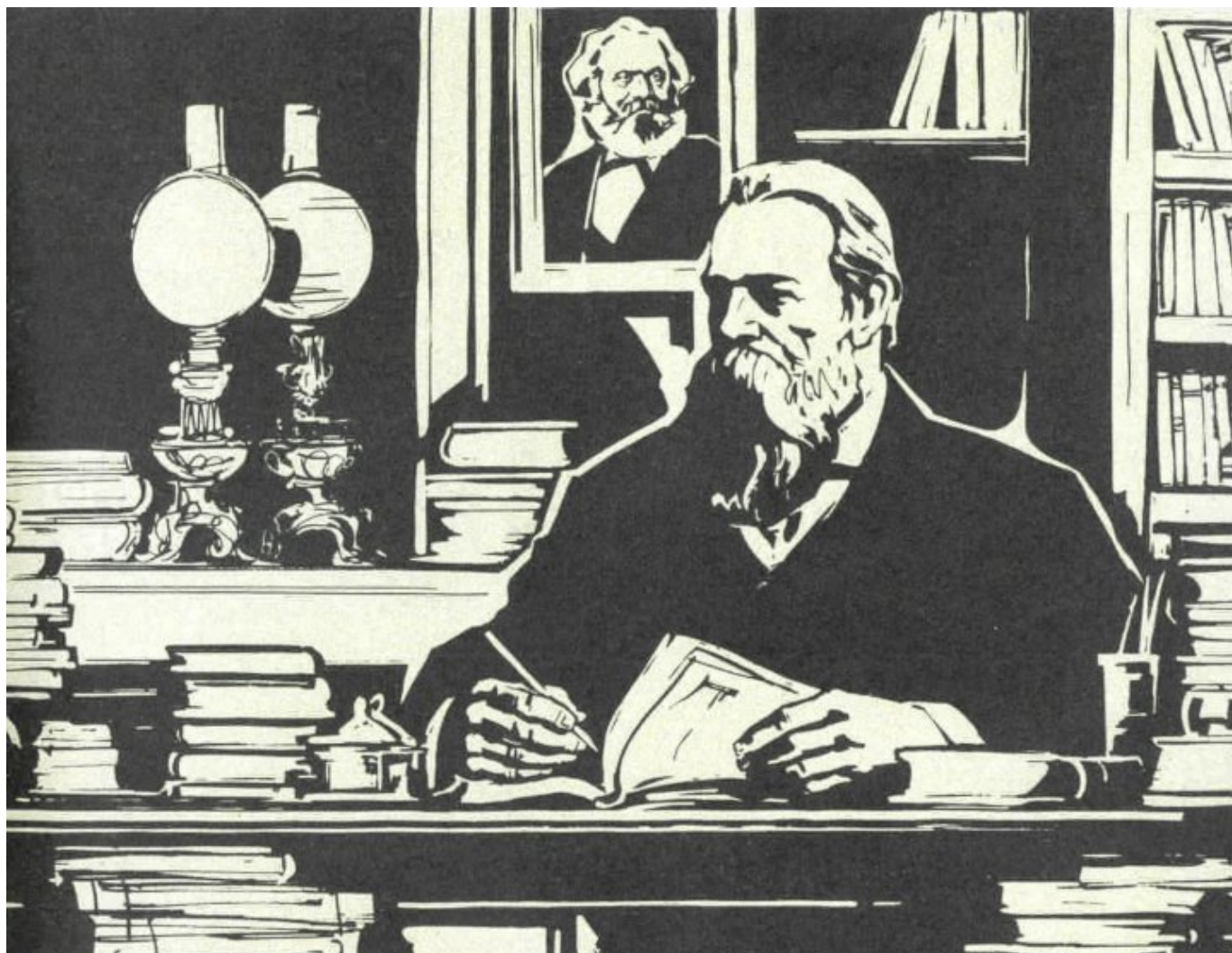




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# Frederick Engels at 200 - better than ever

written by V.I. Lenin  
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*Nov. 28, 2020, marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of Frederick Engels, co-founder of scientific socialism with Karl Marx. The following article, written by the Russian revolutionary V.I. Lenin after Engels' death in 1895, reviews his historic contributions to the struggle for working-class emancipation and socialism.*

*What a torch of reason ceased to burn,  
What a heart has ceased to beat!*

On Aug. 5, 1895, Frederick Engels died in London. After his friend Karl Marx (who died in 1883), Engels was the finest scholar and teacher of the modern proletariat in

the whole world.

From the time that fate brought Karl Marx and Frederick Engels together, the two friends devoted their life's work to a common cause. And so to understand what Frederick Engels has done for the proletariat, one must have a clear idea of the significance of Marx's teaching and work for the development of the contemporary working-class movement.

Marx and Engels were the first to show that the working class and its demands are a necessary outcome of the present economic system, which together with the bourgeoisie inevitably creates and organizes the proletariat. They showed that it is not the well-meaning efforts of noble-minded individuals, but the class struggle of the organized proletariat that will deliver humanity from the evils which now oppress it.

In their scientific works, Marx and Engels were the first to explain that socialism is not the invention of dreamers, but the final aim and necessary result of the development of the productive forces in modern society. All recorded history hitherto has been a history of class struggle, of the succession of the rule and victory of certain social classes over others. And this will continue until the foundations of class struggle and of class domination – private property and anarchic social production – disappear. The interests of the proletariat demand the destruction of these foundations, and therefore the conscious class struggle of the organized workers must be directed against them. And every class struggle is a political struggle.

**'Engels' name should be known to every worker'**

These views of Marx and Engels have now been adopted by all proletarians who are fighting for their emancipation. But when in the 1840s the two friends took part in the socialist literature and the social movements of their time, they were absolutely

novel. There were then many people, talented and without talent, honest and dishonest, who, absorbed in the struggle for political freedom, in the struggle against the despotism of kings, police and priests, failed to observe the antagonism between the interests of the bourgeoisie and those of the proletariat. These people would not entertain the idea of the workers acting as an independent social force.

On the other hand, there were many dreamers, some of them geniuses, who thought that it was only necessary to convince the rulers and the governing classes of the injustice of the contemporary social order, and it would then be easy to establish peace and general well-being on earth. They dreamt of a socialism without struggle.

Lastly, nearly all the socialists of that time and the friends of the working class generally regarded the proletariat only as an ulcer, and observed with horror how it grew with the growth of industry. They all, therefore, sought for a means to stop the development of industry and of the proletariat, to stop the “wheel of history.”

Marx and Engels did not share the general fear of the development of the proletariat; on the contrary, they placed all their hopes on its continued growth. The more proletarians there are, the greater is their strength as a revolutionary class, and the nearer and more possible does socialism become. The services rendered by Marx and Engels to the working class may be expressed in a few words thus: they taught the working class to know itself and be conscious of itself, and they substituted science for dreams.

That is why the name and life of Engels should be known to every worker. That is why in this collection of articles, the aim of which, as of all our publications, is to awaken class-consciousness in the Russian workers, we must give a sketch of the life and work of Frederick Engels, one of the two great teachers of the modern proletariat.

## **An enemy of tyranny**

Engels was born in 1820 in Barmen, in the Rhine Province of the kingdom of Prussia. His father was a manufacturer. In 1838 Engels, without having completed his high-school studies, was forced by family circumstances to enter a commercial house in Bremen as a clerk.

Commercial affairs did not prevent Engels from pursuing his scientific and political education. He had come to hate autocracy and the tyranny of bureaucrats while still at high school. The study of philosophy led him further.

At that time Hegel's teaching dominated German philosophy, and Engels became his follower. Although Hegel himself was an admirer of the autocratic Prussian state, in whose service he was as a professor at Berlin University, Hegel's teachings were revolutionary. Hegel's faith in human reason and its rights, and the fundamental thesis of Hegelian philosophy that the universe is undergoing a constant process of change and development, led some of the disciples of the Berlin philosopher - those who refused to accept the existing situation - to the idea that the struggle against this situation, the struggle against existing wrong and prevalent evil, is also rooted in the universal law of eternal development.

If all things develop, if institutions of one kind give place to others, why should the autocracy of the Prussian king or of the Russian tsar, the enrichment of an insignificant minority at the expense of the vast majority, or the domination of the bourgeoisie over the people, continue forever?

Hegel's philosophy spoke of the development of the mind and of ideas; it was idealistic. From the development of the mind it deduced the development of nature, of man, and of human, social relations. While retaining Hegel's idea of the eternal process of development, Marx and Engels rejected the preconceived idealist view; turning to life, they saw that it is not the development of mind that explains the development of nature but that, on the contrary, the explanation of mind must be derived from nature, from matter. ...

Unlike Hegel and the other Hegelians, Marx and Engels were materialists. Regarding the world and humanity materialistically, they perceived that just as material causes underlie all natural phenomena, so the development of human society is conditioned by the development of material forces, the productive forces. On the development of the productive forces depend the relations into which men enter with one another in the production of the things required for the satisfaction of human needs. And in these relations lies the explanation of all the phenomena of social life, human aspirations, ideas and laws.

The development of the productive forces creates social relations based upon private property, but now we see that this same development of the productive forces deprives the majority of their property and concentrates it in the hands of an insignificant minority. It abolishes property, the basis of the modern social order, it itself strives towards the very aim which the socialists have set themselves. All the socialists have to do is to realise which social force, owing to its position in modern society, is interested in bringing socialism about, and to impart to this force the consciousness of its interests and of its historical task. This force is the proletariat.

### **Socialism and the working class**

Engels got to know the proletariat in England, in the centre of English industry, Manchester, where he settled in 1842, entering the service of a commercial firm of which his father was a shareholder. Here Engels not only sat in the factory office but wandered about the slums in which the workers were cooped up, and saw their poverty and misery with his own eyes.

But he did not confine himself to personal observations. He read all that had been revealed before him about the condition of the British working class and carefully studied all the official documents he could lay his hands on. The fruit of these studies and observations was the book which appeared in 1845: ["The Condition of the Working Class in England."](#)

We have already mentioned the chief service rendered by Engels in writing “The Condition of the Working Class in England.” Even before Engels, many people had described the sufferings of the proletariat and had pointed to the necessity of helping it. Engels was the first to say that the proletariat is not only a suffering class; that it is, in fact, the disgraceful economic condition of the proletariat that drives it irresistibly forward and compels it to fight for its ultimate emancipation. And the fighting proletariat will help itself. The political movement of the working class will inevitably lead the workers to realise that their only salvation lies in socialism. On the other hand, socialism will become a force only when it becomes the aim of the political struggle of the working class.

Such are the main ideas of Engels’ book on the condition of the working class in England, ideas which have now been adopted by all thinking and fighting proletarians, but which at that time were entirely new. These ideas were set out in a book written in absorbing style and filled with most authentic and shocking pictures of the misery of the English proletariat.

The book was a terrible indictment of capitalism and the bourgeoisie and created a profound impression. Engels’ book began to be quoted everywhere as presenting the best picture of the condition of the modern proletariat. And, in fact, neither before 1845 nor after has there appeared so striking and truthful a picture of the misery of the working class.

## **Meeting Marx**

It was not until he came to England that Engels became a socialist. In Manchester he established contacts with people active in the English labor movement at the time and began to write for English socialist publications.

In 1844, while on his way back to Germany, he became acquainted in Paris with Marx, with whom he had already started to correspond. In Paris, under the influence

of the French socialists and French life, Marx had also become a socialist.

Here the friends jointly wrote a book entitled ["The Holy Family, or Critique of Critical Critique."](#) This book, which appeared a year before "The Condition of the Working Class in England," and the greater part of which was written by Marx, contains the foundations of revolutionary materialist socialism, the main ideas of which we have expounded above.

"The holy family" is a facetious nickname for the Bauer brothers, the philosophers, and their followers. These gentlemen preached a criticism which stood above all reality, above parties and politics, which rejected all practical activity, and which only "critically" contemplated the surrounding world and the events going on within it. These gentlemen, the Bauers, looked down on the proletariat as an uncritical mass.

Marx and Engels vigorously opposed this absurd and harmful tendency. In the name of a real, human person – the worker, trampled down by the ruling classes and the state – they demanded, not contemplation, but a struggle for a better order of society. They, of course, regarded the proletariat as the force that is capable of waging this struggle and that is interested in it.

Even before the appearance of "The Holy Family," Engels had published in Marx's and Ruge's *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbucher* his "Critical Essays on Political Economy," in which he examined the principal phenomena of the contemporary economic order from a socialist standpoint, regarding them as necessary consequences of the rule of private property. Contact with Engels was undoubtedly a factor in Marx's decision to study political economy, the science in which his works have produced a veritable revolution.

## **1848 and the Communist Manifesto**

From 1845 to 1847 Engels lived in Brussels and Paris, combining scientific work with practical activities among the German workers in those cities. Here Marx and Engels established contact with the secret German Communist League, which commissioned them to expound the main principles of the socialism they had worked out. Thus arose the famous ["Manifesto of the Communist Party"](#) of Marx and Engels, published in 1848. This little booklet is worth whole volumes: to this day its spirit inspires and guides the entire organized and fighting proletariat of the world.

The revolution of 1848, which broke out first in France and then spread to other West European countries, brought Marx and Engels back to their native country. Here, in Rhenish Prussia, they took charge of the democratic Neue Rheinische Zeitung published in Cologne.

The two friends were the heart and soul of all revolutionary-democratic aspirations in Rhenish Prussia. They fought to the last ditch in defense of freedom and of the interests of the people against the forces of reaction. The latter, as we know, gained the upper hand. The Neue Rheinische Zeitung was suppressed. Marx, who during his exile had lost his Prussian citizenship, was deported; Engels took part in the armed popular uprising, fought for liberty in three battles, and after the defeat of the rebels fled, via Switzerland, to London.

Marx also settled in London. Engels soon became a clerk again, and then a shareholder, in the Manchester commercial firm in which he had worked in the forties. Until 1870 he lived in Manchester, while Marx lived in London, but this did not prevent their maintaining a most lively interchange of ideas: they corresponded almost daily. In this correspondence the two friends exchanged views and discoveries and continued to collaborate in working out scientific socialism.

## **Engels and 'Capital'**

In 1870 Engels moved to London, and their joint intellectual life, of the most

strenuous nature, continued until 1883, when Marx died. Its fruit was, on Marx's side, "[Capital](#)," the greatest work on political economy of our age, and on Engels' side, a number of works both large and small. Marx worked on the analysis of the complex phenomena of capitalist economy. Engels, in simply written works, often of a polemical character, dealt with more general scientific problems and with diverse phenomena of the past and present in the spirit of the materialist conception of history and Marx's economic theory.

Of Engels' works we shall mention: the polemical work against Dühring (analyzing highly important problems in the domain of philosophy, natural science and the social sciences), "[The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State](#)," "Ludwig Feuerbach," an article on the foreign policy of the Russian government, splendid articles on the housing question, and finally, two small but very valuable articles on Russia's economic development ("Frederick Engels on Russia," translated into Russian by Zasulich, Geneva, 1894).

Marx died before he could put the final touches to his vast work on capital. The draft, however, was already finished, and after the death of his friend, Engels undertook the onerous task of preparing and publishing the second and the third volumes of "Capital." He published Volume II in 1885 and Volume III in 1894. (His death prevented the preparation of Volume IV.)

These two volumes entailed a vast amount of labor. Adler, the Austrian Social-Democrat, has rightly remarked that by publishing Volumes II and III of "Capital" Engels erected a majestic monument to the genius who had been his friend, a monument on which, without intending it, he indelibly carved his own name. Indeed these two volumes of "Capital" are the work of two men: Marx and Engels.

Old legends contain various moving instances of friendship. The European proletariat may say that its science was created by two scholars and fighters, whose relationship to each other surpasses the most moving stories of the ancients about

human friendship. Engels always – and, on the whole, quite justly – placed himself after Marx. “In Marx’s lifetime,” he wrote to an old friend, “I played second fiddle.” His love for the living Marx, and his reverence for the memory of the dead Marx were boundless. This stern fighter and austere thinker possessed a deeply loving soul.

## **First and Second Internationals**

After the movement of 1848-1849, Marx and Engels in exile did not confine themselves to scientific research. In 1864 Marx founded the International Working Men’s Association, and led this society for a whole decade. Engels also took an active part in its affairs. The work of the International Association, which, in accordance with Marx’s idea, united proletarians of all countries, was of tremendous significance in the development of the working-class movement.

But even with the closing down of the International Association in the 1870s, the unifying role of Marx and Engels did not cease. On the contrary, it may be said that their importance as the spiritual leaders of the working-class movement grew continuously, because the movement itself grew uninterruptedly.

After the death of Marx, Engels continued alone as the counsellor and leader of the European socialists. His advice and directions were sought for equally by the German socialists, whose strength, despite government persecution, grew rapidly and steadily, and by representatives of backward countries, such as the Spaniards, Romanians and Russians, who were obliged to ponder and weigh their first steps. They all drew on the rich store of knowledge and experience of Engels in his old age.

Marx and Engels, who both knew Russian and read Russian books, took a lively interest in the country, followed the Russian revolutionary movement with sympathy and maintained contact with Russian revolutionaries. They both became socialists after being democrats, and the democratic feeling of hatred for political despotism

was exceedingly strong in them.

This direct political feeling, combined with a profound theoretical understanding of the connection between political despotism and economic oppression, and also their rich experience of life, made Marx and Engels uncommonly responsive politically. That is why the heroic struggle of the handful of Russian revolutionaries against the mighty tsarist government evoked a most sympathetic echo in the hearts of these tried revolutionaries.

On the other hand, the tendency, for the sake of illusory economic advantages, to turn away from the most immediate and important task of the Russian socialists, namely, the winning of political freedom, naturally appeared suspicious to them and was even regarded by them as a direct betrayal of the great cause of the social revolution.

“The emancipation of the workers must be the act of the working class itself” – Marx and Engels constantly taught. But in order to fight for its economic emancipation, the proletariat must win itself certain political rights. Moreover, Marx and Engels clearly saw that a political revolution in Russia would be of tremendous significance to the West European working-class movement as well.

Autocratic Russia had always been a bulwark of European reaction in general. The extraordinarily favorable international position enjoyed by Russia as a result of the war of 1870, which for a long time sowed discord between Germany and France, of course only enhanced the importance of autocratic Russia as a reactionary force. Only a free Russia, a Russia that had no need either to oppress the Poles, Finns, Germans, Armenians or any other small nations, or constantly to set France and Germany at loggerheads, would enable modern Europe, rid of the burden of war, to breathe freely, would weaken all the reactionary elements in Europe and strengthen the European working class.

That was why Engels ardently desired the establishment of political freedom in Russia for the sake of the progress of the working-class movement in the West as well. In him the Russian revolutionaries have lost their best friend.

Let us always honor the memory of Frederick Engels, a great fighter and teacher of the proletariat!

*Written in autumn 1895*

Source: [Marxists Internet Archive](https://www.marxists.org/archive/engels/works/1895/11/28/frederick-engels-at-200-better-than-ever/)

