

*Yelena Stepanova*

FREDERICK  
ENGELS



*F Engels*

#### TO THE READER

*The Foreign Languages Publishing House would be glad to have your opinion of this book and its design and any suggestions you may have for future publications.*

*Please send them to 21, Zubovsky Boulevard, Moscow, U.S.S.R.*

A/21  
E601

3-06989

外文书库

Yelena Stepanova 24

# FREDERICK ENGELS

---



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE

Moscow 1958

Translated by J o h n G i b b o n s

Е. СТЕПАНОВА  
ФРИДРИХ ЭНГЕЛЬС

*Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*

## CONTENTS

I. Childhood and Adolescence . . . . .	5
II. Beginning of the Political Activity of Engels the Revolutionary Democrat . . . . .	11
III. Transition to Materialism and Communism . . . . .	24
IV. The Partnership with Marx. Elaborating the Basis of Scientific Communism. The Struggle for the Proletarian Party (1844-48) . . . . .	37
V. Engels in the Revolution of 1848-49 . . . . .	64
VI. Engels in the Period of Reaction and the New Rise of the Bourgeois-Democratic Movement . . . . .	116
VII. Engels in the Period of the First International and the Paris Commune . . . . .	139
VIII. Engels After the Paris Commune and the First International. Death of Marx (1883) . . . . .	179
IX. Engels after the Death of Marx (1883-95) . . . . .	213



---

## I

### CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

**F**rederick Engels was born on November 28, 1820, into the family of a textile manufacturer in the town of Barmen.

The Rhine province of Prussia, in which Barmen is situated, was then the most developed industrial region of Germany. In contrast to the remainder of Germany where handicrafts and hand labour still prevailed, the Rhineland could boast the first factories and machines. It was here that big capitalist industry, to which England had given birth, began its triumphant march in Germany.

This is explained by the fact that the Rhineland was richly endowed with natural wealth—coal and iron ore; moreover, the bourgeois revolution in France at the end of the eighteenth century had had more of an impact here than in the other parts of Germany: feudal relations and serfdom had been abolished on the left bank of the Rhine. Capitalist industry led to the appearance of an industrial proletariat, and the antagonism between working class and bourgeoisie—the concomitant of capitalist society—became more pronounced.

The factory system brought with it much suffering for the workers in the shape of increased misery and intensified exploitation. Machinery enabled the manufacturers to employ female and child labour on an unprecedented scale; the competition of the miserably paid labour of



women and juveniles lowered wages. And, as was the case everywhere, the rise of capitalism in the Rhineland was accompanied by the ruin of the peasantry, handicraftsmen and the small bourgeoisie in the towns.

The poverty and degradation which Engels witnessed in childhood in his native Wuppertal\* made an indelible impression. In his first articles *Letters from Wuppertal* (1839), he vividly described the plight of factory workers and handicraftsmen in Barmen and Elberfeld.

With genuine sympathy the nineteen-year-old youth writes about the fearful poverty, especially among the Wuppertal factory workers. The sight of child labour shocks him: of 2,500 children of school age in Elberfeld 1,200 have never seen the inside of a school and grow up in factories where they are paid half the wages of adults. Conditions in the factories are deadly for the health of children and adults alike. The chief reason for the poverty and suffering is the "absurd manner in which the factories are run." The effects of large-scale capitalist industry are felt also by the handicraftsmen and artisans. In order to compete with the factories, the weaver working at home sweats day and night and denies himself prime necessities.

Wuppertal, the "German Manchester," a big textile centre, was also a centre of religious medievalism and superstition, a stronghold of pietism—the most intolerant and canting form of Protestantism. Engels in an early letter wrote of it as "Muckertal" (the sanctimonious valley). The Bible and alcohol—these were the things with which the factory owners and masters sought to "brighten" the lives of the workers and artisans, to sidetrack them and secure their submission to the existing order.

---

\* Wuppertal—valley of the River Wupper, where the towns of Barmen and Elberfeld are situated.

"Since the Wuppertal workers in those days," as Engels recalled later, "had to choose between the earthly schnapps of the beershop and the heavenly schnapps of the pietist ministers, it was no wonder that they chose the first, bad though it was."<sup>1</sup>

"Public opinion" in the town was moulded by canting preachers. Gatherings of the faithful were turned into trials of "heretics"—the heretics being those who absented themselves from the kirk, who read books or attended concerts. School education was conducted in the same spirit. Engels, who first attended the local school in Barmen and afterwards the Gymnasium in Elberfeld, recalled that when one of the pupils asked his teacher who Goethe was, he was told: "a godless man."

Such was the social environment in which the impressionable and observant boy grew up.

Nor was his home life much better. Engels's father was deeply religious and a despot. The entire family—including the mother, a splendid, affectionate but rather weak-willed, woman, trembled before the autocrat. The eager and self-willed Frederick with his keen penetrating mind and independent thinking was "the black sheep" of the family. The boy's reading alarmed the father, so much so that in a letter to his wife we find the following:

"Last week Frederick came home with average marks. Outwardly, as you know, his behaviour is better, but it seems that the severe thrashings of the past have not taught him complete obedience even when threatened with chastisement. Today, for instance, I was vexed when I found in his drawer a filthy lending-library book, a novel about the knights of the thirteenth century.... May God save his soul, at times I worry terribly about this otherwise splendid boy.... So far, notwithstanding his excellent qualities, an alarming lack of character and unstable thinking have made themselves felt."<sup>2</sup>

In reality, that which the fanatically religious father described as lack of character and unstable thinking signified independent thinking on the part of the boy who sought to break out of the stifling atmosphere of cant and hypocrisy. Endowed with rare ability, he displayed keen interest in literature, art, music and languages. He indulged in poetry and drew quite successful cartoons. Gay and happy by nature, Engels was distinguished by physical fitness and agility. He loved riding and fencing and was an excellent swimmer. His love of sport and physical exercise remained with him throughout life.

On September 15, 1837, Engels, on the insistence of his father, left the Gymnasium before finishing the last class. His father, who had decided that his son would be a merchant, wanted to apprentice him to commerce. For a year he worked in his father's office, after which he was sent to a big trading firm in Bremen. For the young Engels, however, office work was galling. The prospect of becoming a merchant did not allure him in the least. After working hours he devoted himself chiefly to reading: Already in those days he displayed an amazing capacity for work, ability to make ample use of his time and to live a full life. Early in the morning, before setting out for the office, he was already at his books. "There is no better place for reading," he wrote to friends, "than a garden on a bright spring morning, with a pipe in your mouth and the sun warming your back."<sup>3</sup>

In Bremen, an important seaport, Engels read English, Dutch, French and other foreign newspapers. Literature then proscribed in Germany came into his hands, and he sent it on to his friends in Barmen. The books and newspapers enabled him to fill the gaps in his education and broadened his outlook. Reading foreign newspapers helped him master languages. In a letter to his sister Mary, he jokingly informs her that he can read

in 25 languages. Sometimes he wrote "polyglot" letters to his friends, switching freely from one language to another. "... And in writing a polyglotic letter, I will take now the English language, or rather my beautiful Italian, tender and soothing, like the zephyr, with words that recall the flowers of a lovely garden, and Spanish, like the breeze rustling in trees, and Portuguese, which sounds like the waves lapping a shore gay with flowers and meadows, and French, reminiscent of the rapid gurgling of a spring, and Dutch, which, like the smoke of pipe tobacco, is so cosy."<sup>4</sup>

And the nineteen-year-old Engels actually wrote letters in these languages, though not without mistakes. In Bremen he showed a decided flair for poetry. He dreamed of following in the footsteps of Ferdinand Freiligrath, the Barmen salesman, who had already made a name for himself as a poet.

After the dull and boring atmosphere of Wuppertal, Engels eagerly visited the theatres and concert halls; he was fond of singing and music, especially Beethoven's symphonies. And, as hitherto, he found time for swimming, fencing and riding.

In Bremen, as in Wuppertal, the young man turned his eyes to the life of the workers, to "the plebs who have nothing, but who are better than anything the king has in his kingdom."<sup>5</sup>

Observing the life of the people and devouring books gave an edge to the critical attitude with which Engels had begun to look at the world into which he had been born, to the views and prejudices of the business atmosphere in which he had been brought up.

Engels senior, worried about the spiritual development of his son, arranged for him to stay with a Bremen pastor. But it was while under the parson's roof that Frederick experienced grave doubts about religion and for ever abandoned the faith of his fathers.

The deep inner struggle which he fought with himself at this time is vividly reflected in letters to his friends—the Graeber brothers. Having reached the conclusion that the Bible contained insoluble contradictions and that it was impossible to reconcile science and religion, Engels resolutely broke with the traditions and outlook of his family and his friends.

“...I know,” he wrote to a friend, “that this will get me into a scrape, but, try as I may, I cannot get away from that which is dictated to me by conviction.... When it comes to upholding free thought, I object to any compulsion.”<sup>6</sup>

Tremendous will-power, courage of convictions and unswerving adherence to principle—these are the features which stand out in the letters of the young Engels to his friends.

Engels’s final break with religion was greatly influenced by David Strauss’s *The Life of Jesus*. In this work, which appeared in 1835, Strauss denied the existence of the Christ of the gospels and demonstrated that the gospels contained legend and myth handed down by the early Christian communities. In a letter to V. Graeber, dated October 8, 1839, Engels tells him that he has become an “enthusiastic Straussian,” that thanks to Strauss his “faith is as holey as a sponge.”

Having cast off the strait-jacket of Christianity, Frederick felt himself emancipated. Instead of the Wuppertal faith he began to elaborate a new outlook, to give more and more thought to politics. The impressions of childhood gave way to the investigation and reasoning of the intelligent, talented, courageous and penetrating youth. The social and political situation in the pre-revolutionary Germany and in the neighbouring countries supplied ample food for observation and reasoning and did much to mould the views of the young Engels.

---

## II

### BEGINNING OF THE POLITICAL ACTIVITY OF ENGELS THE REVOLUTIONARY DEMOCRAT

**E**ngels's youth and the moulding of his outlook and political views coincided with a period of acute class struggle in a number of West-European countries. The July revolution (1830) in France marked a turning point. Although, for France, the immediate practical result of this revolution was the replacement of a semi-feudal monarchy by a monarchy enjoying the support of the big financiers and stock-exchange manipulators, its thunder reverberated throughout Europe and jolted the reactionaries. It was followed by uprisings in Belgium, Poland, Italy and Spain. In France, after the 1830 revolution in which the working class played the decisive role on the barricades, the first independent class battles of the proletariat (the uprisings of the Lyons weavers in 1831 and 1834) took place. In England, too, the class struggle assumed sharp forms. The Parliamentary Reform Bill of 1832 paved the way to power for the industrial bourgeoisie, a development which sharply accentuated the antagonisms between the latter and the proletariat. The workers, who had taken an active part in the fight for parliamentary reform and who had backed the de-

mands of the bourgeoisie, saw through their treachery and began to build an independent working-class movement—Chartism.

The news of the July revolution in France gave rise to popular discontent in some parts of the economically backward, and politically dismembered Germany. But the German governments quickly recovered from their momentary panic and with redoubled ferocity set about crushing the slightest manifestation of political burgeoning. It seemed that the peace of the graveyard again reigned in Germany. But only in appearance. Police persecution was now powerless to stem the flood-tide of discontent. The second half of the 1830's and the early 1840's saw a vigorous enlivening of public life and the birth of opposition groups and trends among the bourgeoisie and intelligentsia. This opposition, strongest in the Rhineland, was spearheaded against the autocratic Prussian monarchy, the feudal landlords and the police lawlessness which stifled everything. The opposition, which as yet had not dared to appear openly in the political arena in the shape of parties, formed literary and philosophical groups which indulged in still timid criticism in the form of art and philosophical works.

The Left pupils of Hegel—the Young Hegelians—belonged to this opposition.

Hegel's great service was that he regarded all phenomena in the world dialectically—from the standpoint of their rise, development and dying away. By means of his dialectical method, Hegel sought to disclose the inner laws of development in nature and in human society, to disclose the struggle of opposites which formed the bedrock of this development.

However, for all his encyclopedic erudition and progressive method, Hegel was unable to solve his self-imposed task. His philosophical system suffered from a vital defect: he was an idealist, and his dialectic was,

likewise, idealistic. He believed that development in nature and society was governed by the spirit, the "absolute idea," which existed somewhere even before the world took shape, and that this spirit, this idea, was the beginning of everything. Hegel's "absolute idea," advanced as the creator of nature and human society, was simply a philosophical covering for belief in God. Thus, the splendid edifice of the Hegelian philosophy rested on an unsound and defective basis—on hangovers of a fantastic belief in a Creator.

Basing himself on his idealist outlook, Hegel substituted for real development in nature and society the "self-developing concept," thus turning everything upside down and distorting the real links of phenomena. For the sake of his metaphysical system, Hegel foreswore dialectics, applying it only to the past, not to the present and not to the future. Contrary to his dialectical method, he saw in a monarchy with "estates," as promised to his subjects by the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm the Third, the "crowning" point in human history, the ideal state calling neither for development nor destruction.

Those followers of Hegel who had been influenced by the revolution of 1830 in France, by the upsurge in public life and the growing social and political contradictions in Germany drew different conclusions. If everything changes, if, sooner or later, everything is doomed to destruction and makes way for the new, is it not rational to assume an end to the Prussian monarchy, to domination by feudal landlords and police arbitrariness? The Left Hegelians endeavoured to draw radical political conclusions from the master's philosophy. And since in the Germany of those days politics was a "prohibited zone," they directed their criticism chiefly against religion, which was one of the pillars of the Prussian monarchy.



The criticism of religion made by Strauss's *Life of Jesus* started Engels on his study of the Hegelian philosophy. "Thanks to Strauss," he wrote to Friedrich Graeber on January 21, 1840, "I am now on the high road to Hegelianism. Every evening I read Hegel's *Philosophy of History* with the greatest interest." But, as he wrote to Graeber, he could not become "an ingrained Hegelian."

Neither Hegel's teaching nor the ideas of the Left Hegelians could satisfy him completely: burying themselves in philosophy and religion they were remote from life, from practice and from politics. This defect, in Engels's view, was remedied by Ludwig Börne, whom, in a letter to Graeber, he enthusiastically describes as "a titanic fighter for freedom and right."

Ludwig Börne, German critic and publicist, castigated those scholars who sought to escape from reality to the cloudy spheres of "pure theory." In his view the writer, poet and scholar should be a citizen in the first instance. Börne looked on his pen as a weapon in the political struggle. He saw his task in awakening the German people from their sleep under the protection of police "nurses," to "cast off their blankets." The passionate calls to fight for freedom, which this writer and exile addressed to the German people—especially to the youth,—and his merciless struggle against German jingoism, endeared him to the young Engels.

Hegel and Börne, wrote Engels, seem to supplement one another. While Hegel is a philosopher and thinker, Börne is the man of political practice, able, like none other, to depict the greatness of a cause. And Engels stresses the necessity of unity and interaction of science and life, philosophy and politics, theory and practice.

The correspondence of the nineteen-year-old Frederick and his first literary efforts testify to his political interests and revolutionary sentiment. He dreams of the