

V. I. LENIN

**ON MARX
AND ENGELS**

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WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!

CONTENTS

KARL MARX (<i>A Brief Biographical Sketch with an Exposition of Marxism</i>)	I
FREDERICK ENGELS	47
SPEECH AT THE UNVEILING OF A MEMORIAL TO MARX AND ENGELS, <i>November 7, 1918</i>	60
THE THREE SOURCES AND THREE COMPONENT PARTS OF MARXISM	62
THE MARX-ENGELS CORRESPONDENCE	70
THE HISTORICAL DESTINY OF THE DOCTRINE OF KARL MARX	79
MARXISM AND REVISIONISM	84
NOTES	96

KARL MARX^[1]

(A Brief Biographical Sketch with an Exposition of Marxism)

Karl Marx was born May 5, 1818, in the city of Trier (Rhenish Prussia). His father was a lawyer, a Jew, who in 1824 adopted Protestantism. The family was well-to-do, cultured, but not revolutionary. After graduating from the Gymnasium in Trier, Marx entered university, first at Bonn and later at Berlin, where he studied jurisprudence but devoted most of his attention to history and philosophy. He concluded his course in 1841, submitting his doctoral dissertation on the philosophy of Epicurus. In his views Marx at that time was a Hegelian idealist. In Berlin he belonged to the circle of "Left Hegelians" (Bruno Bauer and others) who sought to draw atheistic and revolutionary conclusions from Hegel's philosophy.

After graduating from the university, Marx moved to Bonn, expecting to become a professor. But the reactionary policy of the government — which in 1832 deprived Ludwig Feuerbach of his chair and in 1836 refused to allow him to return to the university, and in 1841 forbade the young

professor Bruno Bauer to lecture at Bonn — forced Marx to abandon an academic career. At that time the views of the Left Hegelians were developing very rapidly in Germany. Ludwig Feuerbach, particularly after 1836, began to criticize theology and turn to materialism, which in 1841 completely gained the upper hand in his philosophy (*The Essence of Christianity*); in 1843 his *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* appeared. “One must have oneself experienced the liberating effect” of these books, Engels subsequently wrote of these works of Feuerbach. “At once we” (i.e., the Left Hegelians, including Marx) “all became Feuerbachians.”¹ At that time some Rhenish radical bourgeois who had certain points in common with the Left Hegelians founded an opposition paper in Cologne, the *Rheinische Zeitung* (the first number appeared on January 1, 1842). Marx and Bruno Bauer were invited to be the chief contributors, and in October 1842 Marx became chief editor and removed from Bonn to Cologne. The revolutionary-democratic trend of the paper became more and more pronounced under Marx’s editorship, and the government first subjected the paper to double and triple censorship and then decided to suppress it altogether on January 1, 1843. Marx had to resign the editorship before that date, but his resignation did not save the paper, which was closed down in March 1843. Of the more important articles contributed by Marx to the *Rheinische Zeitung*, Engels notes, in addition to those indicated below (see *Bibliography*), an article on the condition of the peasant winegrowers of the Moselle Valley. Marx’s journalistic activity made him realize that he was not suffi-

¹Engels, “Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy,” in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, FLPH, Moscow, 1951, Vol. II, p. 333, translation revised.

ciently acquainted with political economy, and he zealously set out to study it.

In 1843, in Kreuznach, Marx married Jenny von Westphalen, a childhood friend to whom he had been engaged while still a student. His wife came from a reactionary family of the Prussian nobility. Her elder brother was Prussian Minister of the Interior at a most reactionary period, 1850-58. In the autumn of 1843 Marx went to Paris in order to publish a radical magazine abroad, together with Arnold Ruge (born 1802, died 1880; a Left Hegelian; in 1825-30, in prison; after 1848, a political exile; after 1866-70, a Bismarckian). Only one issue of this magazine, *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, appeared. It was discontinued owing to the difficulty of secret distribution in Germany and to disagreements with Ruge. In his articles in this magazine Marx already appeared as a revolutionary advocating "merciless criticism of everything existing," and in particular "criticism by weapons,"¹ and appealing to the *masses* and to the *proletariat*.

In September 1844 Frederick Engels came to Paris for a few days, and from that time forth became Marx's closest friend. They both took a most active part in the then seething life of the revolutionary groups in Paris (of particular importance was Proudhon's doctrine, which Marx thoroughly demolished in his *Poverty of Philosophy*, 1847), and, vigorously combating the various doctrines of petty-bourgeois socialism, they worked out the theory and tactics of revolutionary *proletarian socialism*, or communism (Marxism). (See

¹ See Marx's letter to Arnold Ruge, September 1943, and Marx, "Introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*," in Marx and Engels, *Works*, Ger. ed., Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1956, Vol. I, pp. 344 and 385.

Marx's works of this period, 1844-48, in the *Bibliography*.) In 1845, on the insistent demand of the Prussian Government, Marx was banished from Paris as a dangerous revolutionary. He removed to Brussels. In the spring of 1847 Marx and Engels joined a secret propaganda society called the Communist League; they took a prominent part in the Second Congress of the League (London, November 1847), and at its request drew up the famous *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, which appeared in February 1848. With the clarity and brilliance of genius, this work outlines the new world outlook — consistent materialism, which also embraces the realm of social life, dialectics, as the most comprehensive and profound doctrine of development, the theory of the class struggle and of the world-historic revolutionary role of the proletariat, the creator of a new, communist society.

When the Revolution of February 1848 broke out, Marx was banished from Belgium. He returned to Paris, whence, after the March Revolution, he went to Cologne, Germany. There the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* was published from June 1, 1848, to May 19, 1849; Marx was the editor-in-chief. The new theory was brilliantly corroborated by the course of the revolutionary events of 1848-49, as it has been since corroborated by all proletarian and democratic movements of all countries in the world. The victorious counter-revolution first instigated court proceedings against Marx (he was acquitted on February 9, 1849) and then banished him from Germany (May 16, 1849). Marx first went to Paris, was again banished after the demonstration of June 13, 1849,^[2] and then went to London, where he lived to the day of his death.

His life as a political exile was a very hard one, as the correspondence between Marx and Engels (published in 1913) clearly reveals. Marx and his family suffered dire poverty.

Were it not for Engels' constant and self-denying financial support, Marx would not only have been unable to finish *Capital* but would have inevitably perished from want. Moreover, the prevailing doctrines and trends of petty-bourgeois socialism, and of non-proletarian socialism in general, forced Marx to carry on a continuous and merciless fight and sometimes to repel the most savage and monstrous personal attacks (*Herr Vogt*). Holding aloof from the circles of political exiles, Marx developed his materialist theory in a number of historical works (see *Bibliography*), devoting his efforts chiefly to the study of political economy. Marx revolutionized this science (see below, "The Marxist Doctrine") in his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859) and *Capital* (Vol. I, 1867).

The period of revival of the democratic movements at the end of the fifties and in the sixties recalled Marx to practical activity. In 1864 (September 28) the International Working Men's Association — the famous First International — was founded in London. Marx was the heart and soul of this organization; he was the author of its first Address and a host of resolutions, declarations and manifestoes. Uniting the working-class movement of various countries, striving to direct into the channel of joint activity the various forms of non-proletarian, pre-Marxist socialism (Mazzini, Proudhon, Bakunin, liberal trade-unionism in England, Lassalleian vacillations to the Right in Germany, etc.), and combating the theories of all these sects and petty schools, Marx hammered out a uniform tactic for the proletarian struggle of the working class in the various countries. After the fall of the Paris Commune (1871) — of which Marx gave such a profound, clear-cut, brilliant, *effective* and revolutionary appraisal (*The Civil War in France*, 1871) — and after the International was

split by the Bakuninists, the existence of that organization in Europe became impossible. After the Hague Congress of the International (1872) Marx had the General Council of the International transferred to New York. The First International had accomplished its historical role, making way for a period of immeasurably larger growth of the working-class movement in all the countries of the world, a period, in fact, when the movement grew in *breadth* and when *mass* socialist workers' parties in individual national states were created.

His strenuous work in the International and his still more strenuous theoretical occupations completely undermined Marx's health. He continued his work on the reshaping of political economy and the completion of *Capital*, for which he collected a mass of new material and studied a number of languages (Russian, for instance); but ill-health prevented him from finishing *Capital*.

On December 2, 1881, his wife died. On March 14, 1883, Marx peacefully passed away in his armchair. He lies buried with his wife in the Highgate Cemetery, London. Of Marx's children some died in childhood in London when the family lived in dire poverty. Three daughters married English and French socialists: Eleanor Aveling, Laura Lafargue and Jenny Longuet. The latter's son is a member of the French Socialist Party.

THE MARXIST DOCTRINE

Marxism is the system of the views and teachings of Marx. It was Marx who continued and with genius consummated the three main ideological currents of the nineteenth century,

belonging to the three most advanced countries of mankind: classical German philosophy, classical English political economy, and French socialism together with French revolutionary doctrines in general. The remarkable consistency and integrity of Marx's views, acknowledged even by his opponents, views which in their totality constitute modern materialism and modern scientific socialism, as the theory and programme of the working-class movement in all the civilized countries of the world, oblige us to present a brief outline of his world outlook in general before proceeding to the exposition of the principal content of Marxism, namely, Marx's economic doctrine.

PHILOSOPHICAL MATERIALISM

From 1844-45, when his views took shape, Marx was a materialist, in particular a follower of Ludwig Feuerbach, whose weak sides he saw, later as well, only in the fact that his materialism was not consistent and comprehensive enough. Marx saw the world-historic and "epoch-making" importance of Feuerbach precisely in his having resolutely broken away from the idealism of Hegel and in his proclamation of materialism, which already in the eighteenth century, especially in France, "was not only a struggle against the existing political institutions and . . . religion and theology; it was just as much a . . . struggle . . . against all metaphysics" (in the sense of "drunken speculation" as distinct from "sober philosophy"). (*The Holy Family*, in the *Literarischer Nachlass*.)¹ "To Hegel," wrote Marx, ". . . the process of thinking, which, under the name of 'the Idea,' he even transforms into

¹ Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, FLPH, Moscow, 1956, p. 168.

an independent subject, is the demiurgos" (the creator, the maker) "of the real world. . . . With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought." (*Capital*, Vol. I, Afterword to the Second Edition.)¹ In full conformity with this materialist philosophy of Marx's, and expounding it, Frederick Engels wrote in *Anti-Dübring* (which Marx read in the manuscript): "The unity of the world does not consist in its being. . . . The real unity of the world consists in its materiality, and this is proved . . . by a long and laborious development of philosophy and natural science." "*Motion is the mode of existence of matter.* Never anywhere has there been matter without motion, nor can there be. . . . Matter without motion is just as inconceivable as motion without matter." "But if we . . . ask what thought and consciousness are and whence they come, we find that they are products of the human brain and that man himself is a product of nature, who has developed in and along with his environment; whence it is self-evident that the products of the human brain, which in the last analysis are also products of nature, do not contradict the rest of nature's interconnections but correspond to them." "Hegel was an idealist. To him the thoughts within his brain were not the more or less abstract images" (*Abbilder*, reflections; Engels sometimes speaks of "imprints") "of actual things and processes, but on the contrary, things and their development were only the realized images of the 'Idea,' existing somewhere from eternity before the world existed."² In his *Ludwig Feuerbach* — in which he expounds his and

¹ Marx, *Capital*, FLPH, Moscow, 1954, Vol. I, p. 19.

² Engels, *Anti-Dübring*, FLPH, Moscow, 1959, pp. 65, 86, 55 and 38, translation revised.

Marx's views on Feuerbach's philosophy, and which he sent to the press after re-reading an old manuscript written by Marx and himself in 1844-45 on Hegel, Feuerbach and the materialist conception of history — Engels writes: "The great basic question of all philosophy, and especially of more recent philosophy, is that concerning the relation of thinking and being . . . the relation of mind to nature . . . which is primary, mind or nature. . . . Philosophers were divided into two great camps according to their answer to this question. Those who asserted the primacy of mind over nature and, in the last analysis, therefore, assumed some kind of creation of the world . . . formed the camp of idealism. The others, who regarded nature as primary, belong to the various schools of materialism."¹ Any other use of the concepts of (philosophical) idealism and materialism leads only to confusion. Marx decidedly rejected not only idealism, which is always connected in one way or another with religion, but also the views, especially widespread in our day, of Hume and Kant, agnosticism, criticism^[3] and positivism^[4] in their various forms, regarding such a philosophy as a "reactionary" concession to idealism and at best "a shamefaced way of surreptitiously accepting materialism while publicly denying it."² On this question, see, in addition to the above-mentioned works of Engels and Marx, a letter of Marx to Engels dated December 12, 1866,³ in which Marx, referring to an utterance of the well-known naturalist Thomas Huxley that was "more materialistic" than

¹ Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Moscow, 1951, Vol. II, pp. 334-35, translation revised.

² *Ibid.*, p. 336, translation revised.

³ Marx/Engels, *Briefwechsel*, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1950, Vol. III, pp. 439-40.

usual, and to his recognition that "as long as we actually observe and think, we cannot possibly get away from materialism," reproaches him for leaving a "loophole" for agnosticism and Humism. Especially should we note Marx's view on the relation between freedom and necessity: ". . . freedom is the recognition of necessity. 'Necessity is *blind* only *in so far as it is not understood.*'" (Engels, *Anti-Dübring*.)¹ This means the recognition of objective law in nature and of the dialectical transformation of necessity into freedom (in the same manner as the transformation of the unknown but knowable "thing-in-itself" into the "thing-for-us," of the "essence of things" into "phenomena"). Marx and Engels considered the fundamental shortcomings of the "old" materialism, including the materialism of Feuerbach (and still more of the "vulgar" materialism of Büchner, Vogt and Moleschott), to be: 1) that this materialism was "predominantly mechanical," failing to take account of the latest developments of chemistry and biology (in our day it would be necessary to add: and of the electrical theory of matter); 2) that the old materialism was non-historical, non-dialectical (metaphysical, in the sense of anti-dialectical), and did not apply the standpoint of development consistently and comprehensively; and 3) that these old materialists regarded the "human essence" abstractly and not as the "ensemble" of all (concretely and historically defined) "social relations," and therefore only "interpreted" the world, whereas the point is to "change" it; that is to say, they did not understand the importance of "revolutionary, practical activity."²

¹ Engels, *Anti-Dübring*, Moscow, 1959, p. 157, translation revised.

² See Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Moscow, 1951, Vol. II, pp. 365-67.

DIALECTICS

Hegelian dialectics, the most comprehensive, the richest in content, and the most profound doctrine of development, was regarded by Marx and Engels as the greatest achievement of classical German philosophy. They considered every other formulation of the principle of development, of evolution, to be one-sided and poor in content, and distorting and mutilating the real course of development (which often proceeds by leaps, catastrophes and revolutions) in nature and in society. "Marx and I were pretty well the only people to salvage conscious dialectics" (from the destruction of idealism, including Hegelianism) "for the materialist conception of nature. . . ." "Nature is the test of dialectics, and it must be said for modern science that it has furnished this test with very rich" (this was written before the discovery of radium, electrons, the transmutation of elements, etc.!) "and daily increasing materials, and thus has shown that in the last resort nature works dialectically and not metaphysically. . . ."¹

"The great basic thought," Engels writes, "that the world is to be comprehended not as a complex of ready-made *things* but as a complex of *processes*, in which apparently stable things no less than the concepts, their mental reflections in our heads, go through an uninterrupted change of coming into being and passing away . . . — this great fundamental thought has so thoroughly permeated ordinary consciousness especially since Hegel's time that it is now scarcely ever contradicted in this general form. But it is one thing to acknowledge it in words and another to carry it out in reality in detail in each domain of investigation." For dialectical

¹ Engels, *Anti-Dübring*, Moscow, 1959, pp. 16 and 36, translation revised.

philosophy, “nothing final, absolute or sacred can endure. . . . It reveals the transitory character of everything and in everything, and nothing can endure in its presence except the uninterrupted process of becoming and of passing away, of endless ascent from the lower to the higher, of which it is itself the mere reflection in the thinking brain.” Thus, according to Marx, dialectics is “the science of the general laws of motion, both of the external world and of human thought.”¹

This revolutionary side of Hegel’s philosophy was adopted and developed by Marx. Dialectical materialism “no longer needs any philosophy standing above the other sciences.” Of former philosophy there remains “the science of thought and its laws — formal logic and dialectics.”² And dialectics, as understood by Marx, and in conformity with Hegel, includes what is now called the theory of knowledge, or gnosiology, which must regard its subject matter in the same way — historically, studying and generalizing the origin and development of knowledge, the transition from *non*-knowledge to knowledge.

Nowadays, the idea of development, of evolution, has penetrated the social consciousness almost in its entirety, but by other ways, not through Hegelian philosophy. But as formulated by Marx and Engels basing themselves on Hegel, this idea is far more comprehensive, far richer in content than the current idea of evolution. A development that seemingly repeats the stages already passed, but repeats them differently, on a higher basis (“negation of negation”), a development,

¹ Engels, “Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy,” in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Moscow, 1951, Vol. II, pp. 351, 328 and 350, translation revised.

² Engels, *Anti-Dübring*, Moscow, 1959, pp. 39-40.