

David Riazanov's

KARL MARX and FREDERICK ENGELS

An Introduction to Their Lives and Work

CHAPTER II

THE EARLY REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT IN GERMANY.

THE RHINE PROVINCE.

THE YOUTH OF MARX AND ENGELS.

THE EARLY WRITINGS OF ENGELS.

MARX AS EDITOR OF THE *Rheinische Zeitung*.

WE shall now pass on to the history of Germany after 1815. The Napoleonic wars came to an end. These wars were conducted not only by England, which was the soul of the coalition, but also by Russia, Germany and Austria. Russia took such an important part that Tsar Alexander I, "the Blessed," played the chief role at the infamous Vienna Congress (1814-15), where the destinies of many nations were determined. The course that events had taken, following the peace concluded at Vienna, was not a whit better than the chaos which had followed the Versailles arrangements at the end of the last imperialist war. The territorial conquests of the revolutionary period were wrenched from France. England grabbed all the French colonies, and Germany, which expected unification as a result of the War of Liberation, was split definitely into two parts. Germany in the north and Austria in the south.

Shortly after 1815, a movement was started among the intellectuals and students of Germany, the cardinal purpose of which was the establishment of a United Germany. The arch enemy was Russia, which immediately after the Vienna Congress, had concluded the Holy Alliance with Prussia and Austria against all revolutionary movements. Alexander I and the Austrian Emperor were regarded as its founders. In reality it was not the Austrian Emperor, but the main engineer of Austrian politics, Metternich, who was the brains of the Alliance. But it was Russia that was considered the mainstay of reactionary tendencies; and when the liberal movement of intellectuals and students started with the avowed purpose of advancing culture and enlightenment among the German people as a preparation for unification, the whole-hearted hatred of this group was reserved for Russia, the mighty prop of conservatism and reaction. In 1819 a student, Karl Sand, killed the German writer August Kotzebue, who was suspected, not without reason, of being a Russian spy. This terrorist act created a stir in Russia, too, where Karl Sand was looked up to as an ideal by many of the future Decembrists, and it served as a pretext for Metternich and the German government to swoop down upon the German intelligentsia. The student societies, however, proved insuppressible; they grew even more aggressive, and the revolutionary organisations in the early twenties sprung up from their midst.

We have mentioned the Russian Decembrist movement which led to an attempt at armed insurrection, and which was frustrated on December 14, 1825. We must add that this was not an isolated, exclusively Russian phenomenon. This movement was developing under the influence of the revolutionary perturbations among the intelligentsia of Poland, Austria, France, and even Spain. This movement of the intelligentsia had its counterpart in literature, its chief representative being Ludwig Borne, a Jew, a famous German publicist during the period of 1818-1830 and the first political writer in Germany. He had a profound influence upon the evolution of German political thought. He was a thoroughgoing political democrat, who took little interest in social questions, believing that everything could be set right by granting the people political freedom.

This went on until 1830. In that year the July Revolution shook France, and its reverberations set Germany a quiver. Rebellions and uprisings occurred in several localities, but were brought to an end by some constitutional concessions. The government made short shrift of this movement which was not very deeply rooted in the masses.

A second wave of agitation rolled over Germany, when the unsuccessful Polish rebellion of 1831, which also was a direct consequence of the July Revolution, caused a great number of Polish revolutionists, fleeing from persecution, to seek refuge in Germany. Hence a further strengthening of the old tendency among the German intelligentsia -- a hatred for Russia and sympathy for Poland, then under Russian domination.

After 1831, as a result of the two events mentioned above, and despite the frustration of the July Revolution, we witness a series of revolutionary movements which we shall now cursorily review. We shall emphasise the events which in one way or another might have influenced the young Engels and Marx. In 1832 this movement was concentrated in southern Germany, not in the Rhine province, but in the Palatinate. Just like the Rhine province, the Palatinate was for a long time in the hands of France, for it was returned to Germany only after 1815. The Rhine province was handed over to Prussia, the Palatinate to Bavaria where reaction reigned not less than in Prussia. It can be readily understood why the inhabitants of the Rhine province and the Palatinate, who had been accustomed to the greater freedom of France, strongly resented German repression. Every revolutionary upheaval

in France was bound to enhance opposition to the government. In 1831 this opposition assumed threatening proportions among the liberal intelligentsia, the lawyers and the writers of the Palatinate. In 1832, the lawyers Wirth and Ziebenpfeifer arranged a grand festival in Hambach. Many orators appeared on the rostrum. Borne too was present. They proclaimed the necessity of a free, united Germany. There was among them a very young man, Johann Philip Becker (1809-1886), brushmaker, who was about twenty-three years old. His name will be mentioned more than once in the course of this narrative. Becker tried to persuade the intelligentsia that they must not confine themselves to agitation, but that they must prepare for an armed insurrection. He was the typical revolutionist of the old school. An able man, he later became a writer, though he never became an outstanding theoretician. He was more the type of the practical revolutionist.

After the Hambach festivities, Becker remained in Germany for several years, his occupations resembling those of the Russian revolutionists of the seventies. He directed propaganda and agitation, arranged escapes and armed attacks to liberate comrades from prison. In this manner he aided quite a few revolutionists. In 1833 a group, with which Becker was closely connected (he himself was then in prison), made an attempt at an armed attack on the Frankfort guard-house, expecting to get hold of the arms. At that time the Diet was in session at Frankfort, and the students and workers were confident that having arranged a successful armed uprising they would create a furore throughout Germany. But they were summarily done away with. One of the most daring participants in this uprising was the previously mentioned Karl Schapper. He was fortunate in his escape back to France. It must be remembered that this entire movement was centred in localities which had for a long time been under French domination.

We must also note the revolutionary movement in the principality of Hesse. Here the leader was Weidig, a minister, a religious soul, but a fervent partisan of political freedom, and a fanatical worker for the cause of a United Germany. He established a secret printing press, issued revolutionary literature and endeavoured to attract the intelligentsia. One such intellectual who took a distinguished part in this movement was Georg Buchner (1813-1837), the author of the drama, *The Death of Danton*. He differed from Weidig in that in his political agitation he pointed out the necessity of enlisting the sympathy of the Hessian peasantry. He published a special propaganda paper for the peasants -- the first experiment of its kind -- printed on Weidig's press. Weidig was soon arrested and Buchner escaped by a hair's breadth. He fled to Switzerland where he died soon after. Weidig was incarcerated, and subjected to corporal punishment. It might be mentioned that Weidig was Wilhelm Liebknecht's uncle, and that the latter was brought up under the influence of these profound impressions.

Some of the revolutionists freed from prison by Becker, among whom were Schapper and Theodor Schuster, moved to Paris and founded there a secret organisation called The Society of the Exiles. Owing to the appearance of Schuster and other German workers who at that time settled in Paris in great numbers, the Society took on a distinct socialist character. This led to a split. One faction under the guidance of Schuster formed the League of the Just, which existed in Paris for three years. Its members took part in the Blanqui uprising, shared the fate of the Blanquists and landed in prison. When they were released, Schapper and his comrades went to London. There they organised the Workers' Educational Society, which was later transformed into a communist organisation.

In the thirties there were quite a few other writers alongside of Borne who dominated the minds of the German intelligentsia. The most illustrious of them was Heinrich Heine, the poet, who was also a publicist, and whose Paris correspondence like the correspondence of Ludwig Borne, was of great educational importance to the youth of Germany.

Borne and Heine were Jews. Borne came from the Palatinate, Heine from the Rhine province where Marx and Engels were born and grew up. Marx was also a Jew. One of the questions that invariably presents itself is the extent to which Marx's subsequent fate was affected by the circumstances of his being a Jew.

The fact is that in the history of the German intelligentsia, in the history of German thought, four Jews played a monumental part. They were: Marx, Lassalle, Heine and Borne. More names could be enumerated, but these were the most notable. It must be stated that the fact that Marx as well as Heine were Jews had a good deal to do with the direction of their political development. If the university intelligentsia protested against the socio-political regime weighing upon Germany, then the Jewish intelligentsia felt this yoke even more keenly; one must read Borne to realise the rigours of the German censorship, one must read his articles in which he lashed philistine Germany and the police spirit that hovered over the land, to feel how a person, the least bit enlightened, could not help protesting against these abominations. The conditions were then particularly onerous for the Jew. Borne spent his entire youth in the Jewish district in Frankfort, under conditions very similar to those under which the Jews lived in the dark middle ages. Not less burdensome were these conditions to Heine.

Marx found himself in somewhat different circumstances. These, however, do not warrant the disposition of some biographers to deny this Jewish influence almost entirely.

Karl Marx was the son of Heinrich Marx, a lawyer, a highly educated, cultured and freethinking man. We know of Marx's father that he was a great admirer of the eighteenth-century literature of the French Enlightenment, and that altogether the French spirit seems to have pervaded the home of the Marxes. Marx's father liked to read, and interested his son in the writings of the English philosopher Locke, as well as the French writers Diderot and Voltaire.

Locke, one of the ideologists of the second so-called glorious English Revolution, was, in philosophy, the opponent of the principle of innate ideas. He instituted an inquiry into the origin of knowledge. Experience, he maintained, is the source of all we know; ideas are the result of experience; knowledge is wholly empirical; there are no innate ideas. The French materialists adopted the same position. They held that everything in the human mind reacted in

one way or other through the sensory organs. The degree to which the atmosphere about Marx was permeated with the ideas of the French materialists can be judged from the following illustration.

Marx's father, who had long since severed all connections with religion, continued ostensibly to be bound up with Judaism. He adopted Christianity in 1824, when his son was already six years old. Franz Mehring (1846-1919) in his biography of Marx tried to prove that this conversion had been motivated by the elder Marx's determination to gain the right to enter the more cultured Gentile society. This is only partly true. The desire to avoid the new persecutions which fell upon the Jews since 1815, when the Rhine province was returned to Germany, must have had its influence. We should note that Marx himself, though spiritually not in the least attached to Judaism, took a great interest in the Jewish question during his early years. He retained some contact with the Jewish community at Treves. In endless petitions the Jews had been importuning the government that one or another form of oppression be removed. In one case we know that Marx's close relatives and the rest of the Jewish community turned to him and asked him to write a petition for them. This happened when he was twenty-four years old.

All this indicates that Marx did not altogether shun his old kin, that he took an interest in the Jewish question and also a part in the struggle for the emancipation of the Jew.

This did not prevent him from drawing a sharp line of demarcation between poor Jewry with which he felt a certain propinquity and the opulent representatives of financial Jewry.

Treves, the city where Marx was born and where several of his ancestors were rabbis, was in the Rhine province. This was one of the Prussian provinces where industry and politics were in a high state of effervescence. Even now it is one of the most industrialised regions in Germany. There are Solingen and Remscheid, two cities famous for their steel products. There is the centre of the German textile industry -- Barmen-Elberfeld. In Marx's home town, Treves, the leather and weaving industries were developed. It was an old medieval city, which had played a big part in the tenth century. It was a second Rome, for it was the See of the Catholic bishop. It was also an industrial city, and during the French Revolution, it too was in the grip of a strong revolutionary paroxysm. The manufacturing industry, however, was here much less active than in the northern parts of the province, where the centres of the metallurgical and cotton industries were located. It lies on the banks of the Moselle, a tributary of the Rhine, in the centre of the wine manufacturing district, a place where remnants of communal ownership of land were still to be found, where the peasantry constituted a class of small landowners not yet imbued with the spirit of the tight-fisted, financially aggressive peasant-usurer, where they made wine and knew how to be happy. In this sense Treves preserved the traditions of the middle ages. From several sources we gather that at this time Marx was interested in the condition of the peasant. He would make excursions to the surrounding villages and thoroughly familiarise himself with the life of the peasant. A few years later he exhibited this knowledge of the details of peasant life and industry in his writings.

In high school Marx stood out as one of the most capable students, a fact of which the teachers took cognisance. We have a casual document in which a teacher made some very flattering comments on one of [Earl's] compositions. Marx was given an assignment to write a composition on "How Young Men Choose a Profession." He viewed this subject from a unique aspect. He proceeded to prove that there could be no free choice of a profession, that man was born into circumstances which predetermined his choice, for they moulded his *weltanschauung*. Here one may discern the germ of the Materialist Conception of History. After what was said of his father, however, it is obvious that in the above we have evidence of the degree to which Marx, influenced by his father, absorbed the basic ideas of the French materialists. It was the form in which the thought was embodied that was markedly original.

At the age of sixteen, Marx completed his high school course, and in 1835 he entered the University of Bonn. By this time revolutionary disturbances had well-nigh ceased. University life relapsed into its normal routine.

At the university, Marx plunged passionately into his studies. We are in possession of a very curious document, a letter of the nineteen-year-old Marx to his father.

The father appreciated and understood his son perfectly. It is sufficient to read his reply to Marx to be convinced of the high degree of culture the man possessed. Rarely do we find in the history of revolutionists a case where a son meets with the full approval and understanding of his father, where a son turns to his father as to a very intimate friend. In accord with the spirit of the times, Marx was in search of a philosophy -- a teaching which would enable him to give a theoretical foundation to the implacable hatred he felt for the then prevailing political and social system. Marx became a follower of the Hegelian philosophy, in the form which it had assumed with the Young Hegelians who had broken away most radically from old prejudices, and who through Hegel's philosophy had arrived at most extreme deductions in the realms of politics, civil and religious relations. In 1841 Marx obtained his doctorate from the University of Jena.

At that time Engels too fell in with the set of the Young Hegelians. We do not know but that it was precisely in these circles that Engels first met Marx.

Engels was born in Barmen, in the northern section of the Rhine province. This was the centre of the cotton and wool industries, not far from the future important metallurgical centre. Engels was of German extraction and belonged to a well-to-do family.

In the books containing genealogies of the merchants and the manufacturers of the Rhine province, the Engels family occupies a respectable place. Here one may find the family coat of arms of the Engelses. These merchants, not unlike the nobility, were sufficiently pedigreed to have their own coat of arms. Engels' ancestors bore on their

shield an angel carrying an olive branch, the emblem of peace, signalling as it were, the pacific life and aspirations of one of the illustrious scions of their race. It is with this coat of arms that Engels entered life. This shield was most likely chosen because of the name, Engels, suggesting Angel in German. The prominence of this family can be judged by the fact that its origin can be traced back to the sixteenth century. As to Marx we can hardly ascertain who his grandfather was; all that is known is that his was a family of rabbis. But so little interest had been taken in this family that records do not take us further back than two generations. Engels on the contrary has even two variants of his genealogy. According to certain data, Engels was a remote descendant of a Frenchman L'Ange, a Protestant, a Huguenot, who found refuge in Germany. Engels' more immediate relatives deny this French origin, insisting on his purely German antecedents. At any rate, in the seventeenth century the Engels family was an old, firmly rooted family of cloth manufacturers, who later became cotton manufacturers. It was a wealthy family with extensive international dealings. The older Engels, together with his friend Erman, erected textile factories not only in his native land but also in Manchester. He became an Anglo-German textile manufacturer.

Engels' father belonged to the Protestant creed. An evangelist, he was curiously reminiscent of the old Calvinists, in his profound religious faith, and no less profound conviction, that the business of man on this earth is the acquisition and hoarding of wealth through industry and commerce. In life he was fanatically religious. Every moment away from business or other mundane activities he consecrated to pious reflections. On this ground the relations between the Engelses, father and son, were quite different from those we have observed in the Marx family. Very soon the ideas of father and son clashed; the father was resolved to make of his son a merchant, and he accordingly brought him up in the business spirit. At the age of seventeen the boy was sent to Bremen, one of the biggest commercial cities in Germany. There he was forced to serve in a business office for three years. By his letters to some school chums we learn how, having entered this atmosphere, Engels tried to free himself of its effects. He went there a godly youth, but soon fell under the sway of Heine and Borne. At the age of nineteen he became a writer and sallied forth as an apostle of a freedom-loving, democratic Germany. His first articles, which attracted attention and which appeared under the pseudonym of Oswald, mercilessly scored the environment in which the author had spent his childhood. These letters from Wupperthal created a strong impression. One could sense that they were written by a man who was brought up in that locality and who had a good knowledge of its people. While in Bremen he emancipated himself completely of all religious prepossessions and developed into an old French Jacobin.

About 1841, at the age of twenty, Engels entered the Artillery Guards of Berlin as a volunteer. There he fell in with the same circle of the Young Hegelians to which Marx belonged. He became the adherent of the extreme left wing of the Hegelian philosophy. While Marx, in 1842, was still engrossed in his studies and was preparing himself for a University career, Engels, who had begun to write in 1839, attained a conspicuous place in literature under his old pseudonym, and was taking a most active part in the ideological struggles which were carried on by the disciples of the old and the new philosophical systems.

In the years 1841 and 1842 there lived in Berlin a great number of Russians -- Bakunin, Ogarev, Frolov and others. They too were fascinated by the same philosophy which fascinated Marx and Engels. To what extent this is true can be shown by the following episode. In 1842 Engels wrote a trenchant criticism of the philosophy of Hegel's adversary, Friedrich Schelling. The latter then received an invitation from the Prussian government to come to Berlin and to pit his philosophy, which endeavoured to reconcile the Bible with science, against the Hegelian system. The views expressed by Engels at that period were so suggestive of the views of the Russian critic Bielinsky of that period, and of the articles of Bakunin, that, up to very recently, Engels' pamphlet in which he had attacked Schelling's *Philosophy of Revelation*, was ascribed to Bakunin. Now we know that it was an error, that the pamphlet was not written by Bakunin. The forms of expression of both writers, the subjects they chose, the proofs they presented while attempting to establish the perfections of the Hegelian philosophy, were so remarkably similar that it is little wonder that many Russians considered and still consider Bakunin the author of this booklet.

Thus at the age of twenty-two, Engels was an accomplished democratic writer, with ultra-radical tendencies. In one of his humorous poems he depicted himself a fiery Jacobin. In this respect he reminds one of those few Germans who had become very much attached to the French Revolution. According to himself, all he sang was the Marseillaise, all he clamoured for was the guillotine. Such was Engels in the year 1842. Marx was in about the same mental state. In 1842 they finally met in one common cause.

Marx was graduated from the university and received his doctor's degree in April, 1841. He had proposed at first to devote himself to philosophy and science, but he gave up this idea when his teacher and friend, Bruno Bauer, who was one of the leaders of the Young Hegelians lost his right to teach at the university because of his severe criticism of the official theology.

It was a case of good fortune for Marx to be invited at this time to edit a newspaper. Representatives of the more radical commercial-industrial bourgeoisie of the Rhine province had made up their minds to found their own political organ. The most important newspaper in the Rhine province was the *Kolnische Zeitung*, and Cologne was then the greatest industrial centre of the Rhine district. The *Kolnische Zeitung* cringed before the government. The Rhine radical bourgeoisie wanted their own organ to oppose the *Kolnische Zeitung* and to defend their economic interests against the feudal lords. Money was collected, but there was a dearth of literary forces. Journals founded by capitalists fell into the hands of a group of radical writers. Above them all towered Moses Hess (1812-1875). Moses Hess was older than either Engels or Marx. Like Marx he was a Jew, but he very early broke away from his rich father. He soon joined the movement for liberation, and even as far back as the thirties, advocated the formation of a league of the cultured nations in order to insure the winning of political and cultural freedom. In 1812, influenced by the French communist movement, Moses Hess became a communist. It was he and his friends

who were among the prominent editors of the *Rheinische Zeitung*.

Marx lived then in Bonn. For a long time he was only a contributor, though he had already begun to wield considerable influence. Gradually Marx rose to a position of first magnitude. Thus, though the newspaper was published at the expense of the Rhine industrial middle class, in reality it became the organ of the Berlin group of the youngest and most radical writers.

In the autumn of 1842 Marx moved to Cologne and immediately gave the journal an entirely new trend. In contradistinction to his Berlin comrades, as well as Engels, he insisted on a less noisy yet more radical struggle against the existing political and social conditions. Unlike Engels, Marx, as a child, had never felt the goading yoke of religious and intellectual oppression -- a reason why he was rather indifferent to the religious struggle, why he did not deem it necessary to spend all his strength on a bitter criticism of religion. In this respect he preferred polemics about essentials to polemics about mere externals. Such a policy was indispensable, he thought, to preserve the paper as a radical organ. Engels was much nearer to the group that demanded relentless open war against religion. A similar difference of opinion existed among the Russian revolutionists towards the end of 1917 and the beginning of 1918. Some demanded an immediate and sweeping attack upon the Church. Others maintained that this was not essential, that there were more serious problems to tackle. The disagreement between Marx, Engels and other young publicists was of the same nature. Their controversy found expression in the epistles which Marx as editor sent to his old comrades in Berlin. Marx stoutly defended his tactics. He emphasised the question of the wretched conditions of the labouring masses. He subjected to the most scathing criticism the laws which prohibited the free cutting of timber. He pointed out that the spirit of these laws was the spirit of the propertied and landowning class who used all their ingenuity to exploit the peasants, and who purposely devised ordinances that would render the peasants criminals. In his correspondence he took up the cudgels for his old acquaintances, the Moselle peasants. These articles provoked a caustic controversy with the governor of the Rhine province.

The local authorities brought pressure to bear at Berlin. A double censorship was imposed upon the paper. Since the authorities felt that Marx was the soul of the paper, they insisted on his dismissal. The new censor had great respect for this intelligent and brilliant publicist, who so dexterously evaded the censorship obstacles, but he nevertheless continued to inform against Marx not only to the editorial management, but also to the group of stockholders who were behind the paper. Among the latter, the feeling began to grow that greater caution and the avoidance of all kinds of embarrassing questions would be the proper policy to pursue. Marx refused to acquiesce. He asserted that any further attempt at moderation would prove futile, that at any rate the government would not be so easily pacified. Finally he resigned his editorship and left the paper. This did not save the paper, for it soon was forced to discontinue.

Marx left the paper a completely transformed man. He had entered the newspaper not at all a communist. He had simply been a radical democrat, interested in the social and economic conditions of the peasantry. But he gradually became more and more absorbed in the study of the basic economic problems relating to the peasant question. From philosophy and jurisprudence Marx was drawn into a detailed and specialised study of economic relations.

In addition, a new polemic between Marx and a conservative journal burst out in connection with an article written by Hess who, in 1842, converted Engels to communism. Marx vehemently denied the paper's right to attack communism. "I do not know communism," he said, "but a social philosophy that has as its aim the defence of the oppressed cannot be condemned so lightly. One must acquaint himself thoroughly with this trend of thought ere he dares dismiss it." When Marx left the *Rheinische Zeitung* he was not yet a communist, but he was already interested in communism as a particular tendency representing a particular point of view. Finally, he and his friend, Arnold Ruge (1802-1880), came to the conclusion that there was no possibility for conducting political and social propaganda in Germany. They decided to go to Paris (1843) and there publish a journal *Deutsch-Französischen Jahrbücher* (Franco-German Year Books). By this name they wanted, in contradistinction to the French and German nationalists, to emphasise that one of the conditions of a successful struggle against reaction was a close political alliance between Germany and France. In the *Jahrbücher* Marx formulated for the first time the basic principles of his future philosophy, in which evolution of a radical democrat into a communist is discerned.

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