

## THE MARX-ENGELS CORRESPONDENCE<sup>157</sup>

The long-promised edition of the correspondence of the famous founders of scientific socialism has at last been published. Engels bequeathed the work of publishing it to Bebel and Bernstein, and Bebel managed to complete his part of the editorial work shortly before his death.

The Marx-Engels correspondence, published a few weeks ago by Dietz, Stuttgart, consists of four big volumes. They contain in all 1,386 letters by Marx and Engels covering an extensive period, from 1844 to 1883.

The editorial work, i.e., the writing of prefaces to the correspondence of various periods, was done by Eduard Bernstein. As might have been expected, this work is unsatisfactory both from the technical and the ideological standpoint. After his notorious "evolution" to extreme opportunist views, Bernstein should never have undertaken to edit letters which are impregnated through and through with the revolutionary spirit. Bernstein's prefaces are in part meaningless and in part simply false—as, for instance, when, instead of a precise, clear and frank characterisation of the opportunist errors of Lassalle and Schweitzer which Marx and Engels exposed, one meets with eclectic phrases and thrusts, such as that "Marx and Engels were not always right in opposing Lassalle" (Vol. III, p. xviii), or that in their tactics they were "much nearer" to Schweitzer than to Liebknecht (Vol. IV, p. x). These attacks have no purpose except to serve as a screen and embellishment for opportunism. Unfortunately, the eclectic attitude to Marx's ideological struggle against many of his opponents is becoming increasingly widespread among present-day German Social-Democrats.

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*5/19/13*

First page  
of the manuscript of Lenin's  
"The Marx-Engels  
Correspondence".  
End of 1913.  
Reduced

Переноска Маркса и Энгельса.  
- Энгельс как один из основателей коммунизма. 1)

Главное обязанное издание переноски графически  
двух основателей научного социализма как такового, увы,  
но свётл. Энгельс забвён изданием Бабелю и Бернштейн-  
ку, и Бабелю ушёл из жизни незадолго до своей смерти  
покончить свою часть редакционной работы.

Переноска Маркса и Энгельса, вышедшая естество-  
но надолго тому назад в Штутгарте у Дитца, издава-  
вшая из себя четыре бабелювых тома. В них во-  
шло всего 1386 страниц Маркса и Энгельса за громад-  
ный промежуток времени от 1844 по 1883 год.

Редакторская работа, т.е. содержание пред-  
словий к переноске за отдалённый период, выполнена  
Д. Бернштейном. Как и следовало ожидать, эта  
работа неудовлетворительна ни с технической ни

1) Начало неоконченной статьи, написанной  
в 1913 г. в начале 1914 года.

From the technical standpoint, the index is unsatisfactory—only one for all four volumes (Kautsky and Stirling are omitted, for instance); the notes to individual letters are too scanty and are lost in the editor's prefaces instead of being placed in proximity to the letters they refer to, as they were by Sorge, and so forth.

The price of the publication is unduly high—about 20 rubles for the four volumes. There can be no doubt that the complete correspondence could and should have been published in a less luxurious edition at a more reasonable price, and that, in addition, a selection of passages most important from the standpoint of principle could and should have been published for wide distribution among workers.

All these defects of the edition will, of course, hamper a study of the correspondence. This is a pity, because its scientific and political value is tremendous. Not only do Marx and Engels stand out before the reader in clear relief in all their greatness, but the extremely rich theoretical content of Marxism is graphically revealed, because in their letters Marx and Engels return again and again to the most diverse aspects of their doctrine, emphasising and explaining—at times discussing and debating—what is newest (in relation to earlier views), most important and most difficult.

There unfolds before the reader a strikingly vivid picture of the history of the working-class movement all over the world—at its most important junctures and in its most essential points. Even more valuable is the history of the *politics* of the working class. On the most diverse occasions, in various countries of the Old World and the New, and at different historical moments, Marx and Engels discuss the most important principles of the *presentation* of the *political* tasks of the working class. And the period covered by the correspondence was a period in which the working class separated from bourgeois democracy, a period in which an independent working-class movement arose, a period in which the fundamental principles of proletarian tactics and policy were defined. The more we have occasion in our day to observe how the working-class movement in various countries suffers from opportunism in consequence of the stagnation and decay of the bourgeoisie, in consequence of the attention of the labour leaders being engrossed in the triv-

ialities of the day, and so on—the more valuable becomes the wealth of material contained in the correspondence, displaying as it does a most profound comprehension of the *basic* aims of the proletariat in bringing about change, and providing an unusually flexible definition of the tasks of the tactics of the moment from the standpoint of these revolutionary aims, without making the slightest concession to opportunism or revolutionary phrase-mongering.

If one were to attempt to define in a single word the focus, so to speak, of the whole correspondence, the central point at which the whole body of ideas expressed and discussed converges—that word would be *dialectics*. The application of materialist dialectics to the reshaping of all political economy from its foundations up, its application to history, natural science, philosophy and to the policy and tactics of the working class—that was what interested Marx and Engels most of all, that was where they contributed what was most essential and new, and that was what constituted the masterly advance they made in the history of revolutionary thought.

We intend in the following account, after giving a general review of the correspondence, to outline the most interesting remarks and arguments of Marx and Engels, without pretending to give an exhaustive account of the contents of the letters.

### I. GENERAL REVIEW

The correspondence opens with letters written in 1844 by the 24-year-old Engels to Marx. The situation in Germany at that time is brought out in striking relief. The first letter is dated the end of September 1844 and was sent from Barmen, where Engels's family lived, and where he was born. Engels was not quite 24 years old at the time. He was bored with family life and was anxious to break away. His father was a despot, a pious manufacturer, who was outraged at his son's continual running about to political meetings, and at his communist convictions. Engels wrote that had it not been for his mother, of whom he was

deeply fond, he would not have spent at home even the remaining few days before he was due to leave. "You would never believe," he complained to Marx "what petty reasons, what superstitious fears were put forward by the family against my departure."<sup>158</sup>

While he was still in Barmen—where he was delayed a little longer by a love affair—Engels gave way to his father and worked for about two weeks in the factory office (his father was a manufacturer). "Huckstering is too horrible," he writes to Marx. "Barmen is too horrible, the way they waste their time is too horrible, and above all things it is too horrible to remain, not merely a bourgeois, but a manufacturer, a bourgeois who actively opposes the proletariat." He consoled himself, Engels goes on to say, by working on his book on the condition of the working class (this book appeared, we know, in 1845 and is one of the best works of world socialist literature). "And perhaps one can while being a Communist remain in one's outward status a bourgeois and a huckstering beast as long as one does not write, but to carry on a wide communist propaganda and at the same time engage in huckstering and industry will not work. Enough. At Easter I quit here. Add to this the drowsy life of a thoroughly Christian-Prussian family—I cannot stand it any longer; I might in the end become a German philistine and introduce philistinism into communism."<sup>159</sup> Thus wrote the young Engels. After the Revolution of 1848 the exigencies of life obliged him to return to his father's office and to become a "huckstering beast" for many long years. But he was able to stand firm and to create for himself, not Christian-Prussian surroundings, but entirely different, comradely surroundings, and to become for the rest of his life a relentless foe of the "introduction of philistinism into communism".

Social life in the German provinces in 1844 resembled Russian social life at the beginning of the twentieth century, before the Revolution of 1905. There was a general urge for political life, a general seething indignation in opposition to the government; the clergy fulminated against the youth for their atheism; children in bourgeois families quarrelled with their parents over their "aristocratic treatment of servants or workers".

The general spirit of opposition found expression in the fact that everybody declared himself to be a Communist. "The Police Commissary in Barmen is a Communist," Engels writes to Marx. He was in Cologne, Düsseldorf, Elberfeld—wherever he turned he stumbled upon Communists! "One ardent Communist, a cartoonist ... named Seel, is going to Paris in two months. I shall give him your address; you will all like him for his enthusiastic temperament and his love of music, and he could very well be useful as a cartoonist."<sup>160</sup>

"Miracles are happening here in Elberfeld. Yesterday [this was written on February 22, 1845], we held our third communist meeting in the largest hall and the best restaurant of the city. The first meeting was attended by 40 people, the second by 130 and the third by at least 200. The whole of Elberfeld and Barmen, from the moneyed aristocracy to the small shopkeepers, was represented, all except the proletariat."

This is literally what Engels wrote. Everybody in Germany at that time was a Communist—except the proletariat. Communism was a form of expression of the opposition sentiments of all, and chiefly of the bourgeoisie. "The most stupid, the most lazy and most philistine people, who take no interest in anything in the world, are almost becoming enthusiastic over communism."<sup>161</sup> The chief preachers of communism at that time were people of the type of our Narodniks, "Socialist-Revolutionaries", "Popular Socialists",<sup>162</sup> and so forth, that is to say, well-meaning bourgeois, some to a greater, others to a lesser degree, furious with the government.

And under such conditions, amidst countless pseudo-socialist trends and factions, Engels was able to find his way to *proletarian* socialism, without fearing to break off relations with a mass of well-intentioned people, who were ardent revolutionaries but bad Communists.

In 1846 Engels was in Paris. Paris was then seething with politics and the discussion of various socialist theories. Engels eagerly studied socialism, made the acquaintance of Cabet, Louis Blanc and other prominent socialists, and ran from editorial office to editorial office and from circle to circle.

His attention was chiefly focussed on the most important and most widespread socialist doctrine of the time—Proudhonism. And even *before* the publication of Proudhon's *Philosophy of Poverty* (October 1846; Marx's famous reply, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, appeared in 1847), Engels, with ruthless sarcasm and remarkable profundity, criticised Proudhon's basic ideas, which were then being particularly advocated by the German Socialist Grün. His excellent knowledge of English (which Marx mastered much later) and of English literature enabled Engels at once (letter of September 16, 1846) to point to the example of the bankruptcy of the notorious Proudhonist "labour bazaars"<sup>163</sup> in England. Proudhon *disgraces* socialism, Engels exclaims indignantly—it follows from Proudhon that the workers must *buy out* capital.

The 26-year-old Engels simply annihilates "true socialism". We meet this expression in his letter of October 23, 1846, long before the *Communist Manifesto*, and Grün is mentioned as its chief exponent. An "anti-proletarian, petty-bourgeois, philistine" doctrine, "sheer phrase-mongering", all kinds of "humanitarian" aspirations, "superstitious fear of 'crude' communism" (Löffel-Kommunismus, literally: "spoon communism" or "belly communism"), "peaceful plans to bestow happiness" upon mankind—these are some of Engels's epithets, which apply to *all* species of pre-Marxist socialism.

"The Proudhon plan of association," writes Engels, "was discussed for three evenings. At first I had nearly the whole clique with Grün at their head against me.... The chief point was to prove the necessity for revolution by force." (October 23, 1846). In the end he got furious, he writes, and drove his opponents so hard that they were obliged to make an open attack on communism. He demanded a vote on whether they were Communists or not. This caused great indignation among the Grünites, who began to argue that they had come together to discuss "the good of mankind" and that they must know what communism *really* was. Engels gave them an extremely simple definition so as to permit no opportunity for evasions. "I therefore defined," Engels writes, "the objects of the Communists in this way: (1) to achieve the interests of the proletariat in opposition

to those of the bourgeoisie; (2) to do this through the abolition of private property and its replacement by community of goods; (3) to recognise no means of carrying out these objects other than a democratic revolution by force."<sup>164</sup> (Written a year and a half before the 1848 Revolution.)

The discussion ended with the meeting's adopting Engels's definition by thirteen votes against the votes of two Grünites. These meetings were attended by some twenty journeymen carpenters. Thus the foundations of the Social-Democratic Workers' Party of Germany were laid in Paris sixty-seven years ago.

A year later, in his letter of November 23, 1847, Engels informed Marx that he had prepared a draft of the *Communist Manifesto*, incidentally declaring himself opposed to the catechism form originally proposed. "I begin: What is Communism?" writes Engels. "And then straight to the proletariat—history of its origin, difference from former workmen, development of the contradiction between proletariat and bourgeoisie, crises, results.... In conclusion the Party policy of the Communists."

This historical letter of Engels's on the first draft of a work which has travelled all over the world and which to this day is true in all its fundamentals and as actual and topical as though it were written yesterday, clearly proves that Marx and Engels are justly named side by side as the founders of modern socialism.

Written at the end of 1913

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Signed: N. Lenin

Published according to  
the manuscript

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