



**Engels and Marx: Revolutionaries in London**  
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The V&A was born of the Great Exhibition of 1851, that extraordinary gathering in London's Hyde Park which brought together a display of the world's greatest technological, design, manufacturing and artistic artefacts under Joseph Paxton's glass-and-steel Crystal Palace dome.

For chauvinists of the era, it was testament to Great Britain's place as Workshop of the World and capital city of the greatest Empire since the Romans; to Prince Albert and Henry Cole, its progenitors, the Exhibition was a wake-up call to British industry that it was falling behind its global competitors.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels understood the Great Exhibition in a different light; an awesome example of the globalisation of capital which they had predicted in *The Communist Manifesto* of 1851. "This exhibition is a striking proof of the concentrated power with which modern large-scale industry is everywhere demolishing national barriers and increasingly blurring local peculiarities of production, society and national character among all peoples."

Indeed, Marx would go on to describe the Great Exhibition as the quintessential "emblem of the capitalist fetishism of commodities" and, in the process, provide the beginnings of the intellectual arsenal for Walter Benjamin's 'Arcades Project.'

But it was from the profits of the Great Exhibition of 1851 that Prince Albert was able to endow the South Kensington Museum – and its original collections came from some of the exhibits in the Hyde Park display. Albert wanted it to be a 'storehouse or treasury' of science and art; a collection to inspire a new generation of designers, artists, engineers and manufacturers. It also had a broader civic component.

Within the storehouse, visitors to London's Victoria and Albert Museum today can read the heroic call from *The Communist Manifesto* in our Prints & Drawings Study Room, adorned across Dmitrii Moor's political poster, printed and published in 1936 USSR. The design represents the world's workers as a single, monumental and resolute figure, dwarfing the armed figure of Fascism. Visitors can also see Engels' face – this time, shown on a propaganda poster from China, produced in May 1969, at the time of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

Across the capital, there are other memories of Engels's time in the city and that is what I wish to explore this evening. To think about his time in London (rather than the Rhineland or, most famously, Manchester) and how it shaped some of his later, Marxian thinking.

‘One accustoms oneself only with difficulty to the gloomy atmosphere and the mostly melancholy people, to the seclusion, the class divisions in social affairs, to the life in closed rooms that the climate prescribes,’ wrote Friedrich Engels of London. What is more, ‘one has to tone down somewhat the spirit of life brought over from the Continent, to let the barometer of zest for life drop from 760 to 750 millimetres until one gradually begins to feel at home.’

Yet this low skilled, pea-souped capital had its benefits, as ‘one finds oneself slowly blending in and discovers that it has its good side, that the people generally are more straightforward and trustworthy than elsewhere, that for scholarly work no city is so suitable as London, and that the absence of annoyances from the police compensates for a great deal.’

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were, famously, Rhineland radicals: products of East Prussia, whose philosophy was deeply indebted to the German intellectual tradition. But Marx actually lived for most of his life in London; and Engels too. This city was as influential in their political progression and ideological development as the Continent, so it is only right that we reflect on their history in the capital. It was here they enjoyed great personal happiness with wives, families and – perhaps, above all – their friends; as well as painful personal losses and all the travails of bourgeois life.

### The Journey to Hampstead

So, how did Marx and Engels arrive in North London? Friedrich Engels was born two hundred years ago into a strict, conservative, and God-fearing family. The Engelses were textile magnates whose successful family firm was part of a local economy oriented around the production of silk and spinning of cotton, alongside the bleaching and dyeing of textiles. My reading is that his was a happy childhood. His upbringing offered no inkling of a revolutionary destiny: no broken home, no lost father, no lonely childhood.

But from an early age, Engels found the human costs of his family’s prosperity hard to bear. Around him in the Wupper Valley – the ‘German Manchester’ – was not just environmental pollution (the smog; the red-dyed rivers; the stench) but terrible social immiseration. At aged 19, Engels anonymously published his first critique of capitalism in a series of *Letters from Wuppertal* which traced the plight of factory workers, ‘in low rooms where people breathe in more coal fumes & dust than oxygen’; and lamented the creation of ‘totally demoralized people, with no fixed abode or definite employment, who crawl out of their refuges, haystacks, stables at dawn.’ He was not yet a communist, even a socialist, but a fierce young critic of the human costs of capitalism – even as it enriched his own family.

Engels’ conversion to communism came at the University of Berlin in the early 1840s when through a reading of Hegel, the Young Hegelians and Ludwig Feuerbach, Engels came to understand the nature of alienation. In the God-head, Feuerbach suggested, man had constructed a deity in his own image and likeness. Yet so replete with perfection was this objectified God that mankind started to abase himself before its spiritual authority. As such, the original power relationship was reversed. ‘Man – this is the secret of religion – projects his essence into objectivity and then makes himself an object of this projected image of himself that is thus converted into a subject ...’. And the more fervently man worshipped an exterior God, the more internally impoverished he became. It was a zero-sum relationship: for the Deity to prosper, man had to be degraded.

The next step in the chain was provided by the so-called ‘communist rabbi’ Moses Hess, who allowed Engels to see the idea of human alienation as a political rather than solely religious one.

Man was alienated from his true essence by private property and the broader money economy. What was a question of theology and philosophy was transferred in Engels's hands into a political science: the move from idealism to materialism. Nowhere displayed the effects of alienation more obviously than the home of the 1851 Great Exhibition: Great Britain and, in particular, Manchester. With its vast manu-factories, wealthy mill owners, and hideously brutalised proletariat, the coming social crisis was all set to emerge in the heartland of the industrial revolution. 'The English are the nation of praxis, more than any other nation. England is to our century what France has been to the previous one.' Socialism was first set to emerge in England.

Between the years 1842-44, Engels lived and worked in Manchester and from his time here we gain the sublime brilliance of *The Condition of the Working Class in England* – for which Engels is probably now remembered more than anything else:

'What power, what incisiveness and what passion drove you to work in those days. That was a time when you were never worried by academic scholarly reservations! Those were the days when you made the reader feel that your theories would become hard facts if not tomorrow then at any rate on the day after. Yet that very illusion gave the whole work a human warmth and a touch of humour that makes our later writings – where 'black and white' have become 'grey and grey' – seem positively distasteful'.

Engels's chapter on "The Great Towns" provides both the philosophical and journalistic spine of the book, but it is not all solely focused on Manchester. The chapter begins in London, with an almost Wordsworthian sense of urban romance as Engels recounts sailing up the Thames with, 'the masses of buildings, the wharves on both sides ... the countless ships along both shores ... all this is so vast, so impressive, that a man cannot collect himself, but is lost in the marvel of England's greatness...'. But such greatness came at a terrible price for the capital's proletariat. 'These Londoners have been forced to sacrifice the best qualities of their human nature, to bring to pass all the marvels of civilization which crowd their city.'

With echoes of de Quincey, Engels sets off to walk the streets and quickly finds that the 'gay world' of Oxford Street, Regent Street, Trafalgar Square and the Strand hides the awful truth of Seven Dials and St Giles, in whose rookeries, cellars and garrets 'no human being could possibly wish to live in.' Further east lay the terrible slums of Whitechapel, Bethnal Green and Spitalfields, and Engels is clearly inspired by the works of Thomas Carlyle as he recounts the isolation, indifference, and egotism of industrial England. 'The dissolution of mankind into monads, of which each one has a separate essence, and a separate purpose, the world of atoms, is here carried to its utmost extreme.'

The same searing critique of the effects of capitalism on social relations and the conditions of the proletariat is pursued across each of Britain's great cities until Engels arrives at Manchester, 'and because I know it as intimately as my own native town, more intimately than most of its residents know it, we shall make a longer stay here.' For here was where the manufacturing proletariat revealed itself 'in its fullest classic perfection.'

*The Condition* is published back in Germany in 1845 as a warning to the Rhineland bourgeoisie as to the effects of unregulated capitalism on social cohesion. But before he reached Barmen, Engels stopped off in Paris and struck up that incredible friendship with Karl Marx over 10 days of drinking, arguing, carousing, and reading.

What is there left to say of Karl Marx? 'He is a phenomenon who made a most deep impression,' was how Moses Hess described him. 'Be prepared to meet the greatest, perhaps the only real philosopher living now. When he will appear in public he will draw the eyes of all Germany upon

him ... he combines deepest philosophical seriousness with cutting wit. Can you imagine Rousseau, Voltaire, Holbach, Lessing, Heine and Hegel combined – not thrown together – in one person? If you can, you have Dr. Marx.'

Like Engels, Marx had come to see that class-based capitalism progressively alienated man from himself. And, like Engels, he regarded the solution to this crisis of alienation lying in the property-less hands of the very class created by capitalism, the proletariat.

For the next forty years, their relationship barely faltered even amidst the most wretched of circumstances. Fundamental to this friendship was a division of responsibility: from Paris onward, Engels came to recognise Marx's superior ability to provide the ideological grounding of 'our outlook.' 'Marx was a genius; we others were at best talented. Without him the theory would not be by far what it is today. It therefore rightly bears his name.' This faith in Marx's genius was what convinced Engels to step back, sacrifice the development of his own ideas and play 'second fiddle' to 'so splendid a first fiddle as Marx.' 'How anyone can be envious of genius; it's something so very special that we, who have not got it, know it to be unattainable right from the start; but to be envious of anything like that one must have to be frightfully small-minded.'

The next four years see Marx and Engels at their most collaborative as they shared lodgings in Paris and Brussels, returned to Manchester to research political economy, sought to develop their communism into a coherent philosophy (principally through works such as *The German Ideology*), and find a political vehicle for their thinking through The Communist League. Out of this, of course, emerges their most celebrated polemic, *The Communist Manifesto*.

But the Manifesto was better than the *actualite* and after the collapse of the 1848-9 revolution, Engels and Marx sought political asylum back in London. Although not without the notice of the local authorities. 'We cannot make a single step without being followed by them wherever we go,' Engels publicly protested in a letter written in his hand under Marx's name to *The Spectator* in June 1850.

Jenny Marx had followed her husband across the Channel in September 1849 with their three small children and a fourth on the way – Heinrich Guido (nicknamed 'Fawksey') who earned his incendiary soubriquet by being born on 5th November 1849. But with only irregular funds from freelance journalism, niggardly publishing contracts and a doomed attempt to relaunch the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, Marx was in no position to support his family. Jenny Marx later described this period as one of 'great hardship, continual acute privations, and real misery.'

Crammed together with under-nourished brothers and sisters in a series of grotty flats, Guido suffered an infancy of wretched privation and fatigue. 'Since coming into the world, he has never slept a whole night through – at most, two or three hours. Latterly, too, there have been violent convulsions, so that the child has been hovering constantly between death and a miserable life. In his pain he sucked so hard that I got a sore on my breast – an open sore; often blood would spurt into his little, trembling mouth,' Jenny wrote in a desperate, fund-raising letter to their Communist friend Joseph Weydemeyer.

For a lady of Jenny von Westphalen's lineage, there was also the indignity of an existence spent harried across London by bakers, butchers, milkmen and bailiffs as Marx dodged bills and blagged new lodgings. It was a debilitating, humiliating, sickening time and young Guido suffered the effects. 'Just a line or two to let you know that our little gunpowder-plotter, Fawksey, died at ten o'clock this morning,' Marx wrote to Engels in November 1850. 'You can imagine what it is like here ... If you happen to feel so inclined, drop a few lines to my wife. She is quite distracted.' Jenny and Karl Marx were to lose two other children, Franziska and Edgar ('Colonel Musch'), to

the same noxious mix of poverty, damp and disease.

There was nothing else to be done. To support Marx, Marx's growing family and, most importantly of all, the writing of *Das Kapital*, Engels willingly offered up his own financial security, philosophical researches, and even his good name. He had to retreat to Manchester for twenty years to work for the family firm Ermen & Engels in order to support Marx and his attempts to produce a masterwork outlining their political philosophy. 'The two of us form a partnership together,' Marx soothingly explained, 'in which I spend my time on the theoretical and party side of the business,' while Engels's job was to provide the financial support by busying himself at commerce.

Manchester, was at that time, a centre for the technological developments in the spinning and weaving of cotton thread that had so greatly improved the quality of English cotton available to textile printers. The blue thread in the selvedge of the fabric of an early dress in the V&A's collection indicates that it was made in England, most probably Manchester. The roller-printed cotton furnishing fabric, printed by Manchester firm, John Marshall & Sons, ca. 1820, demonstrates the applications of the time.

So the profits from Ermen & Engels up in Manchester were used to keep the Marxes from total immiseration and fund the writing of *Das Kapital*. 'Dear Mr. Engels,' as Jenny Marx was apt to address him, was regularly allocating over half his annual income to the Marx family – totalling between £3,000 - £4,000 (£300,000 - £400,000 in today's terms) over the twenty year period he was employed.

### Kentish Town

And that money, first of all, went to extract the Marx family from their Soho lodgings – what Jenny called the 'evil, frightful rooms' in Dean Street - for a house in altogether more respectable Kentish Town. In 1855 the family moved into 9 Grafton Terrace, 'a small house at the foot of romantic Hampstead Heath, not far from lovely Primrose Hill.'

Whilst Marx took the tram down to the British Library Reading Room to work away on *Das Kapital*, the three Marx daughters were sent to South Hampstead College for Ladies. The weekend was reserved for yomps on the Heath. Jenny Marx would conjure up a lavish pic-nic (mostly from Engels's funds), while Karl would buy flagons of beer from Jack Straw's Castle. There were games of hide and seek, the shaking of chestnut trees, marches over into Highgate, and then, on the walk back to Kentish Town, Marx would lead his family in renditions of German folk-songs, Negro spirituals, and great chunks of Dante and Shakespeare. 'We really thought we were living in a magic castle', as Jenny Marx put it. And, meanwhile, poor old Engels was counting cotton reels in Manchester... 'The day that manuscript is sent off, I shall drink myself to kingdom come,' Engels promised Marx in 1865.

Inevitably, it would take another couple of year before the first volume of *Das Kapital* – 'this economy shit' – was ready for the printers. But when it appeared, the relief was tangible. The sacrifice, the boredom, the barren frustration of the Manchester years had been worth it. 'I am exceedingly gratified by this whole turn of events, firstly, for its own sake, secondly, for your sake in particular and your wife's, and thirdly, because it really is time things looked up,' Engels wrote in a heartfelt letter to Marx. 'There is nothing I long for so much as for release from this vile commerce, which is completely demoralizing me with all the time it is wasting. For as long as I am in it, I am good for nothing else...'

'Without you, I would never have been able to bring the work to a conclusion,' Marx wrote back with a guilty air to his steadfast funder in May 1867, 'and I can assure you it always weighed like a

nightmare on my conscience that you were allowing your fine energies to be squandered and to rust in commerce, chiefly for my sake, and into the bargain, you had to share all my petites miseres as well.’ But thoughtlessly he chose not to dedicate the work to Engels. Instead, the mercenary Marx gave that honour to Wilhelm Wolff who had died in 1864 leaving him a very welcome £843.

With *Kapital* finally published, Engels could not wait to leave Manchester. After a series of protracted negotiations with his business partner Godfrey Ermen – who always knew that Engels was never going to establish any kind of competitor business – Engels was bought out and headed south to London.

### **Primrose Hill Radical**

The move to the capital was all arranged for Engels by Jenny Marx. ‘I have now found a house, which charms all of us because of its wonderful open situation, she wrote in July 1870. She knew exactly what Engels would need for his new life: four, ideally five bedrooms; a study; two living rooms; a kitchen; and nothing on too steep a gradient given Lizzy’s asthma. ‘It is next to Primrose Hill, so all the front rooms have the finest and openest view and air. And round about, in the side streets, there are shops of all sorts, so your wife will be able to buy everything herself.’ The interior of the house boasted an impressive kitchen and a ‘very spacious bathroom with large bathtub.’ Jenny, who had clearly not yet abandoned her bourgeois predilection for property, thought it best ‘if your wife came with you right away and saw for herself. You know we shall be very happy to have her with us.’

Primrose Hill had been subject during the preceding thirty years to exactly the kind of class-based urban planning Engels had chronicled in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. Previously, a secluded district of cottages and farms on the edges of London, it had gained a rough, seedy reputation thanks to its proximity to Chalk Farm Tavern – a notorious drinking, whoring and fighting shop. But gentrification called in the mid-19th century as Lord Southampton and the Eton College estate started to lay out a model village transforming open fields into a descending array of detached and semi-detached villas followed by a series of terraced streets.

Alongside the developers, the railway had also been at work shaping Engels’s new neighbourhood. The track from Euston station (named after a Suffolk village on one of Lord Southampton’s estates) to Birmingham New Street created a natural northern and eastern boundary which was complemented on the south by the Regent’s Canal. Behind the streets’ fashionable, neo-Regency veneer was a London suburb hammered into shape by the messy, dirty forces of industrialisation.

With the trains came hundreds of engineers, signalmen, lamp men, porters, shunters and cleaners who provided tenants for the subdivided houses and thirsty custom for the plentiful pubs (which Engels, with his predilection for bottled Pilsener, tended to avoid).

Today, Engels’s four-storey, terraced home still stands at 122 Regent’s Park Road opposite the Queens’ pub and diagonally across the entrance to Primrose Hill. Thanks to the efforts of local resident Jenny Hutt (daughter of leading Communist Party activist Allen Hutt) a 1971 blue plaque from the Greater London Council marks the spot describing Engels rather anodyne as a ‘political philosopher.’ The first floor – which most Victorians would have used as their drawing room - was converted into Engels’s vast study: an airy, well-lit studio with a polished, Norwegian pine floor, ceiling high bookcases, a magisterial fireplace and tall, French windows looking out onto the noisy bustle of Regent’s Park Road and beyond to Primrose Hill.

Engels was a man of strict routine for whom the highlight of the day was visiting Marx around the corner at Maitland Villas. ‘Engels came to see my father every day,’ Tussy Marx remembered, ‘they sometimes went for a walk together but just as often they remained in my father’s room, walking up and down, each on his side of the room, boring holes with his heel as he turned on it in his corner ... Frequently they walked up and down side by side in silence. Or again, each would talk about what was then mainly occupying him until they stood face to face and laughed aloud, admitting that they had been weighing opposite plans for the last half hour.’ When they did go for a walk, it was a brisk, discursive hike of ‘one and a half German miles’ up and around Hampstead Heath where the Rhinelanders breathed in ‘more ozone than in the whole of Hanover.’

This daily schedule had one exception. ‘On Sundays, Engels would throw open his house. On those puritanical days when no merry men can bear life in London Engels’s house was open to all, and no one left before 2 or 3 in the morning,’ recalled the communist exile August Bebel. All and sundry – ‘socialists, critics and writers. Anybody who wanted to see Engels could just go’ – were welcome at No. 122 for an afternoon of wine-fuelled discussion stomach-lined by ‘a fairly “liberal” helping of meat and salad.’

The house speciality was a springtime bowl of Maitrank – a May wine flavoured with woodruff. There would be German folk songs round the piano or Engels reciting his favourite poem, *The Vicar of Bray* (which he later translated into German for the Social Democrat songbook, *Vorwärts*), while the cream of European socialism – from Karl Kautsky to William Morris to Wilhelm Liebknecht to Keir Hardie – played court to the man whom the British Marxist Henry Hyndman called the ‘grand Llama of the Regent’s Park Road. Election nights to the German Reichstag were a particularly riotous affair. ‘Then Engels laid in a huge cask of special German beer, laid on a special supper, invited his very intimates. Then, as the telegrams came pouring in from all parts of Germany far into the night, every telegram was torn open, its contents read aloud by the General, and if it was victory we drank, and if it was defeat we drank.’

For Engels’s house was indeed the hub of international socialism in London during the 1870s and ‘80s. Marx and Engels had established the International Working Men’s Association – later, the Socialist International – as their political vehicle for change. And as the International’s corresponding secretary for Belgium, then Italy, Spain, Portugal and Denmark, Engels was placed in de facto charge of co-ordinating the proletarian struggle across the Continent. He masterminded this messy, hydra-headed machine all from his study at No. 122 Regent’s Park Road.

‘Every day, every post, brought to his house newspapers and letters in every European language,’ recalled Paul Lafargue, ‘and it was astonishing how he found time, with all his other work, to look through, keep in order, and remember the chief contents of them all.’ ‘It was like a little Tower of Babel business,’ according to Tussy’s lover Edward Aveling, ‘For not only those of us that were really of his family were present, but the Socialists from other countries made 122 Regent’s Park Road their Mecca.’ This included Karl Kautsky, William Morris, Wilhelm Liebknecht, Keir Hardie and John Burns.

Given such an extensive calendar of communist festivities, it was no surprise Engels was watched by an array of security forces: the French, the Prussians, even the Metropolitan Police. For Engels, who otherwise valued the lack of British state harassment, these hapless officers were a source of amusement rather than annoyance.

‘We have every evening a bobby promenading before the house,’ he noted in 1883 as he and Carl Schorlemmer hid giggling behind the shutters. ‘The imbeciles evidently think we are manufacturing dynamite, when in reality we are discussing whisky.’

## Primrose Hill Philosophy

Beyond the whisky, Bordeaux and *Maitrank*, what did Marx and Engels's time in North London produce in terms of political philosophy? Let me focus on two areas of Marxist thought which might have been influenced by Marx and Engels's time in North London. The first is Engels's changing critique of capitalism.

For Engels was in London during the boom years of the mid-Victorian economy. The British economy, mirroring Engels's move from north to south, was shifting its profit centre from the industrial north to the City of London, with its financial services sector. 'We here are now in the full swing of prosperity and thriving business,' Engels wrote in 1871. 'There is a surplus of capital on the market and it is looking everywhere for a profitable home; bogus companies, set up for the happiness of mankind and the enrichment of the entrepreneurs, are shooting up out of the ground like mushrooms. Mines, asphalt quarries, horse-drawn tramways for big cities, and iron works seem to be the most favoured at the moment ...'. The British economy was on its way towards a more concentrated form of monopoly capitalism, which would only hasten the coming contradiction.

"Floating" – transforming large private concerns into limited companies – has been the order of the day for the last ten years and more,' Engels reported in 1881. 'From the large Manchester warehouses of the City to the ironworks and coalpits of Wales and the North and the factories of Lancashire, everything has been, or is being, floated.' Imperial London became 'the clearing house of the world' and the surplus capital that resulted from this stock-market flotation was soon at work across the globe.

What this centralising finance capitalism – with its wild swings, great riches, and equally celebrated bankruptcies – helped Engels to understand was the relentless instability of the modern market. As a manufacturer in the Manchester cotton trade, Engels was already well aware of how global fluctuations could suddenly put thousands out of work, close down industries, and impoverish entire communities – but now he saw this accelerating through the globalised financial system. Whereas Marx had only spoken of the 'shaking' of capitalist production, Engels spoke more definitely of the coming 'collapse' of capitalism...

Secondly, Engels addressed the question of urban regeneration – or what we might call gentrification. From his study at No. 122 Regent's Park Road, he wrote a hugely important paper entitled 'On the Housing Question' which interrogated the issue of urban space and class power in the context of what he calls 'the spirit of Haussmann.' Christened in honour of Baron Eugène Haussmann, the *prefet* of the Seine departement who had despotically transformed Paris from a cobbled, decaying medieval city into an imperial metropolis worthy of Napoleon III, the term 'Haussmann' became a template for class driven, inner-city regeneration.

First of all, through economic forces. Just as the capitalist enriches himself from the industry of the proletariat by exploiting his labour power far above its exchange value, so when it comes to the property market if land values rise then old buildings are pulled down (with their working-class residents dispersed) and in their place shops, warehouses and public buildings are erected. And on demolition and construction sites across Manchester, Liverpool, Paris and Berlin, the bourgeoisie were exploiting the surplus value, the unearned increment, of land prices to reap huge profits at great human cost. 'The result is that the workers are forced out of the centre of the towns towards the outskirts; that workers' dwellings, and small dwellings in general, become rare and expensive and often altogether unobtainable ...'.

However, the spirit of Haussmann could move in other ways. Under the guise of security, sanitation, or gentrification, Engels detected a growing tendency on the part of city government to



exert its spatial authority in order to dictate the urban form - whether this is done from considerations of public health and for beautifying the town, or owing to the demand for big centrally situated business premises, or owing to traffic requirements, such as the laying down of railways, streets, etc.' For no matter what the justification, the result was always the same: 'the scandalous alleys and lanes disappear to the accompaniment of lavish self-praise from the bourgeoisie on account of this tremendous success, but they appear again immediately somewhere else and often in the immediate neighborhood.'

London, of course, suffered equally heavily from such Haussmanesque interventions in the mid-Victorian years: it was the slumlands of St Giles (New Oxford Street), Whitechapel (Commercial Road), Pimlico (Victoria Street), and Clerkenwell (Farringdon Road) which suffered at the hands of the bourgeois city authorities.

But, finally, London also offered the hope of a practical, socialist future. 'On 4th May, 1890, the English proletariat, rousing itself from forty years of hibernation, rejoined the movement of its class.' On its inaugural May Day march, London witnessed a bravura display of socialist prowess with workers and activists gathering from first light along the Victoria Embankment. Leading the procession were the dock labourers and gas workers of the East End, followed by the ranks of the Women's Trade Union League, the Bloomsbury Socialist Society, the North Camberwell Progressive Club, the East Finsbury Radical Club, West Newington Reform Club and myriad trade unions. By the time the procession entered Hyde Park numbers had swelled to over 200,000 with radical banners and placards dotting the horizon.

For Engels the rally heralded a symbolic shedding of Liberal confusion from the English working classes who, after the collapse of the mid-Victorian boom, had finally rediscovered their Chartist, socialist inheritance. The passage towards an effective socialist political programme had been a long time coming. No one seemed capable in Britain of the kind of dull, steady organisational and ideological slog which Liebknecht and Kautsky were undertaking in Germany or Lafargue and Guesde in France.

He initially had strong hopes for William Morris and his Socialist League (and we, at the V&A, are always keen to sing Morris's praises). However, the relationship between Morris and Engels was never going to be easy. The aethereal, ethical, arts and craft Morris rarely disguised his disinterest in the rational, technical precepts of scientific socialism. 'To speak frankly, I do not know what Marx's Theory of Value is, and I'm damned if I want to know,' he explained to one public meeting. 'It is enough political economy for me to know that the idle rich class is rich and the working-class is poor, and that the rich are rich because they rob the poor.'

His Utopian tract, *News from Nowhere*, advocated a revolutionary return to the pre-industrial past with medieval garb, craft guilds, the Houses of Parliament turned into a dung-heap and a London rid of industry – in fact, the mirror opposite to Engels's embrace of production, politics and technology as the prerequisites for delivering socialism. As soon as the ill-disciplined Morris started to flirt with anarchism, Engels excommunicated him as 'a sentimental dreamer pure and simple.' Engels feared it would take an exhaustive course of bi-weekly seminars to teach Morris anything credible about socialism, 'but who has the time to do it, and if you drop him for a month, he is sure to lose himself again. And is he worth all that trouble even if one had the time?'

So Engels was truly delighted when, in spring 1889, Will Thorne, a socialist stoker at the Beckton gasworks, started to unite his fellow workers into a National Union of Gasworkers and General Labourers in an attempt to improve the site's appalling terms and conditions. Within four months, the union had some 20,000 members and Thorne had secured a cut in the basic working day from twelve hours to eight.

On 12 August 1889 Ben Tillett, the secretary of the small Tea Operatives Union, found himself besieged by men insisting he follow Thorne's lead and confront the dock owners. But his demands for an increase in wages from 4d to 6d an hour, with 8d for overtime and a minimum employment period of half a day, were rejected out of hand by dock bosses who remained confident that the East End's vast reserve army of labour would always undermine worker solidarity. Together with the socialist activists Tom Mann and John Burns, Tillett proved them wrong by founding the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers' Union of Great Britain and Ireland.

Reading the reports of the strike in the London papers, Engels was ecstatic. 'The dock strike has been won. It's the greatest event to have taken place in England since the last Reform Bills and marks the beginning of a complete revolution in the East End,' he wrote breathlessly to Karl Kautsky in September 1889. 'Hitherto the East End had been in a state of poverty-stricken stagnation, its hallmark being the apathy of men whose spirit had been broken by hunger, and who had abandoned all hope ... Then, last year, there came the victorious strike of the [Bryant & May] match-girls. And now, this gigantic strike of the most demoralized elements of the lot, the dock labourers...', he told Bernstein.

And this was the point: what was so encouraging about the dock labourers' protest was that even the *residuum*, the lumpen-proletariat now appeared ready to rise. 'If Marx had lived to witness this! If these poor down-trodden men, the dregs of the proletariat, these odds and ends of all trades, fighting every morning at the dock gates for an engagement, if they can combine, and terrify by their resolution the mighty Dock Companies, truly then we need not despair of any section of the working-class.'

And so, London, Engels hoped, at the end of his life in the 1890s, might provide the revolutionary moment that all Marxists were hoping for. And, I have to report, they are still hoping... But if London did not provide the actual kindling of social revolution, it did provide Marx and Engels with the intellectual energy, personal freedom, and ideological impetus to form some of their most significant works. The 'old Londoners,' as they became known, developed an affectionate regard for the 'gloomy atmosphere' and 'melancholy people' of the capital: its open, liberal acceptance of political refugees, market economy, and even-handed application of the rule of law – even to those dedicated to overturning it all. And, today, Engels's house in Regent's Park and Marx's grave at Highgate Cemetery are important parts of the historic fabric and tourist identity of the city.

He was born in the Wupper Valley; he died on Primrose Hill. His was an extraordinary, rich life of lows and highs and a man whose influence would be felt right around the world. His energy, humour, intelligence, humanity, loyalty, and commitment were all attributes which I so enjoyed getting to know during the writing of my biography. And I thank you enormously for inviting me to share in commemorating his bicentenary.

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