

Introduction

In the light of the devastating socio-economic effects unleashed by the *pandemic-of-the-century crisis* that is upsetting the whole world, we repropose in all of its explosive topicality what Friedrich Engels – the 200th anniversary of whose birth we celebrate – argued was “the whole of the social antagonisms of today” when, in the pages of his *Anti-Dühring*, he blamed the “anarchy of [*capitalist*] social production” and the “coercive laws of competition”, which “blindly” impose themselves “independently of the producers, and in antagonism to them”, to the point of giving birth to a system in which “the product governs the producers” – a world that does not recognise the “*social nature*” of the modern productive forces, and in which both science and production, subject to a one-sided appropriation, continue to be caught up in a capital and interstate war that prevents their free expression towards a truly human development.

Even more, also in this crisis as in all of the previous ones, Marxist science confirms itself as the only one capable of facing the challenge of understanding and explaining the nature and course of the events and, what matters most, of orienting the struggle of the revolutionary vanguards of the international proletariat. Denied, falsified, revised and adapted on very many occasions, in over 170 years, Marxism has always scorned all of its detractors and all of its false servants and has punctually found verifications at every historical appointment.

This is why Lenin’s warning continues to be valid when in 1916, on the threshold of the October Revolution and in the midst of the imperialist world conflict, he wrote: “Wherever Marxism is popular among the workers ... the ‘bourgeois labour party’ will swear by the name of Marx. It cannot be prohibited from doing this, just as a trading firm cannot be prohibited from using any particular label, sign or advertisement. It has always been the case in history that after the death of revolutionary leaders who were popular among the oppressed classes, their enemies have attempted to appropriate their names so as to deceive the oppressed classes.” It cannot be prohibited but – Lenin continued in the same writing – a “relentless struggle” against imperialism and the opportunistic enemy of the working class must be waged ... today no less than yesterday, in the face of the continuing multiplication of every kind of self-interested manipulators.

Friedrich Engels was born on November 28th 1820 in Barmen (Wuppertal) and died on August 5th 1895 in London. In the 50 years of his political life, together with Karl Marx, he gave the workers the possibility of recognising themselves, their condition as the exploited, their place in history and the inevitable necessary solution in communism.

Engels and Marx were bound by deep friendship and by continually working together; the contributions of both to laying the foundations of scientific socialism are innumerable.

Seeing the workers' conditions, they were the first not to content themselves with feelings of justice or plans for future utopian societies that many others pursued, however. They were the first to seek and to find the laws that regulate the historical evolution of the human species in the production and reproduction of material life. But this was not enough: they argued that recognising an absolutely objective base did not exempt them from getting to the heart of the clash among the classes or from working for a working-men's organisation capable of an independent policy.

And they did this, from 1847 to 1864, from the Communist League to the first International Working Men's Association. Then, when Marx died in 1883, Engels continued to study and work for a decade, publishing writings by Marx and himself and fighting against the opportunistic tendencies present in the labour movement at the end of the nineteenth century.

It is well-known that Engels wished to present himself as playing "*second violin*" to Marx. In an 1884 letter to J.P. Becker he wrote: "I have spent a lifetime doing what I was fitted for, namely playing second fiddle ... And I was happy to have so splendid a first fiddle as Marx." This is an excess of revolutionary modesty since their scientific, strategic and practical association was actually and to all effects "fully shared" and, as Lenin again recalled, without taking into account "all" of Engels' works, "it is impossible to understand Marxism".

It is therefore impossible to separate Engels from Marx. Just as it is impossible to separate Marx and Engels from the revolutionary struggle.

His was the exemplary life of a labour militant and leader. In 1886, still in the midst of his revolutionary battle, he wrote that the will is based on passion and deliberation, even if these are subsequently governed by the profound course of history.

We need to remember this today, especially because the acquisition of the strategic lessons, tactical capacity and organisational tenacity of the Marxist tradition is still absent in the political experience of vast strata of the European labour movement.

Passion and deliberation are needed for the necessary work of rebuilding a revolutionary party, whose delay is more attributable to insufficient consciousnesses than to the actual conditions of reality.

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