Engels 1820-1895: The struggle for scientific socialism

Tue, 30/05/1995 - 10:59

To mark the centenary of the death of Fredrick Engles, Dave Stockton chronicles Marx and Engles' fight for scientific socialism the rank of the early German workers' movement and explains the lasting significance of Engles' book, Anti-Duhring, for generations of socialists.

The contribution of Frederick Engels to Marxism has been the subject of much controversy. Many attempts have been made to present him as the falsifier of Marx's doctrine and method.

It is claimed that Engels tried to turn Marxism into natural science, transforming it into a rigid set of predictions about the inevitable victory of socialism. Critics brand Engels as the man responsible for robbing Marxism of its "humanist essence" and for the reformist degeneration of the Second International. By association, Engels is found guilty of laying the basis for both Stalinism and reformist Social Democracy.

In short, Engels has been blamed for most of the problems that have beset Marxism since Marx's death in 1883.

In the 1920s and 1930s there had already been a reaction against the "scientism" of the Second International. Lukacs and Gramsci wanted to improve Marxism by a "return to Hegel" an appeal to philosophy against science. They mainly targeted Karl Kautsky, the pre 1914 "pope of Marxism". But they often came close to attacking Engels. Only the crushing bureaucratism of Stalinism stopped the left intellectuals' assault on Engels in the 1930s.

In the 1960s, as the "new left" emerged, attacks on Engels multiplied. George Lichtheim in his 1961 book Marxism An Historical and Critical Study claimed:

"For better or worse Socialist practice over the greater part of Europe came to reflect an attitude of mind which derived final confirmation from the materialist doctrine expounded by Engels in his writings of the late 1870s and 1880s."

This led to, "the transformation of Marxism into a 'scientific' doctrine emptied of genuine philosophic content and hence powerless to stop the inrush of romantic irrationalism which began in the 1890s and reached a disastrous climax in the 1930s."1

Not only was Engels responsible for reformism and Stalinism, but fascism too!

Lichtheim's theme was developed by Marxist and "post Marxist" writers alike such as Alfred Schmidt, Lucio Colletti, Shlomo Avineri, Louis Aithusser and Lesek Kolakowski. It reached a climax in the 1980s with the works of Norman Levine2 and Terrel Carver's various works.'

What unites these writers is the idea that Marx and Engels were "opposites not twins". Marx who referred to Engels as "my alter ego " was Dr Jekyll to Engels' Mr Hyde. In order to dress up their own revisions of Marxism as orthodoxy, twentieth century intellectuals have loaded everything they do not like about Marx's Marxism onto Engels creating in Engels a kind of fetish object, the irony of which would not have been lost on the two founders of scientific socialism.

Nearly all attacks on Engels start with his most encyclopaedic work, Anti-Duhring4, or with its shortened and popularised version Socialism, Utopian and Scientific.

But these works represent the most rounded and complete presentation of both the methodology of Marxism, and its
main tenets: in economics, politics and history. This presentation was well known to Marx, approved of explicitly by him, and represents the combined views of the two comrades as they looked back on forty years of collaboration.

In this article we will look at the genesis of Anti-Duhring, what it added to Marxism, and why it should remain what Lenin called it: "a handbook for every class conscious worker."

**Winning the Labour Movement to Marxism**

After the defeat of the Paris Commune (1871), the International Working Men's Association (IWMA) held two Congresses, in London and the Hague (1871 and 1872 respectively) to discuss the lessons of the failed revolution.

These meetings marked a turning point in Marx and Engels' perspectives for the workers' movement. The clashes in the First International with the anarchists, the British trade union leaders, and even with their former allies, the French Blanquists, all convinced Marx and Engels that the era of relying on the existing forces assembled in the IWMA was over.

Marx and Engels had won the political battles in the International but they had not yet achieved the creation of parties in the main European countries and North America committed to scientific socialism. The failure of the Commune was the most spectacular confirmation of this.

Marx and Engels now realised that a new stage in the history of the workers' movement was beginning; that of building disciplined, democratic, mass workers' parties.

They recognised that the existing forms of workers' organisation would never accomplish the social revolution. The forces in the IWMA a collection of secret conspiratorial societies, reformist trade unions and the propaganda sects of pre scientific socialism had to face up to this task or remain irrelevant. Marx and Engels therefore proposed an amendment to the IWMA statutes which said:

"In its struggle against the collective power of the possessing classes the proletariat can only act as a class if it constitutes its own distinct political party, opposed to all the old parties formed by the possessing classes. The forming of a political party by the proletariat is indispensable in order to assure the triumph of the revolution and its ultimate object, the abolition of all classes. The coalition of working class forces already obtained in economic struggles, must also serve as a lever in the hands of that class in its struggle against the political power of its exploiters. The lords of the earth and the lords of capital always use their political privileges to defend and perpetuate their economic monopolies and to enslave Labour, and therefore the conquest of political power is the great duty of the proletariat." 6

Having achieved their political victory over Bakunin's anarchists, Marx and Engels proposed that the International move its headquarters to New York, putting it out of the reach of the European sects. Yet within two years the First International was dead. It could not survive the shattering blow of the defeat of the Paris Commune and the ideological struggle that broke out within its ranks as a result of drawing the lessons of that experience. Engels recognised that the First International had served its function and outlived its usefulness:

"In order to produce a new International like the old one an alliance of all the proletarian parties of all countries a general suppression of the workers' movement like that which prevailed from 1849 to 1864 would be necessary. For this the proletarian world has become too big, too extensive. I think the next International after Marx's writings have been at work for some years will be directly Communist and will openly proclaim our principles." 7

They realised that their next task in that direction was to win over the largest and growing national workers' movement directly to scientific socialism. Marx and Engels turned their attention to the newly unified Germany where two small but stable workers' parties already existed. The first was founded by Ferdinand Lassalle in 1863 the General German Workers' Union (ADAV). Marx and Engels tried to influence Lassalle and his successor J. B. Von Schweitzer.

Their attempts were shipwrecked on differences over which side to support in the conflict between Bismarck and the
Progressive Party (Liberals) over constitutional liberties and the method of unifying Germany.

Marx and Engels insisted that German socialists must maintain the Great German perspective (i.e. union with German speaking Austria) and support the Liberal bourgeoisie whenever it clashed with Bismarck's bonapartism over democratic issues. Lassalle and his successors, however, were willing to respond to Bismarck's approaches for a secret block against the Liberals.

They were ready to accept Bismarck's policy of excluding Austria and thus ensuring a Germany dominated by Prussia and its Junker (landowner) class. Bismarck was prepared to consider universal suffrage as long as any elected parliament was denied control over the executive and the armed forces. Bismarck had good reason to believe that the still predominantly rural electorate could be intimidated into voting for the Conservatives by their landowning employers, their pastors and their priests. Such "democracy", Marx and Engels always insisted, was a "fig leaf for absolutism".

The second strand in the German labour movement, inaugurated by the old Communist League member Wilhelm Liebknecht and the young worker August Bebel, was the Social Democratic Workers Party. It was founded in 1869 at a congress at Eisenach. The programme adopted there only took the first steps away from radical Liberalism but it had certain marked superiorities over that of the Lassalleans.

In a series of articles written by August Bebel, a key young worker leader, the deception that a "half free or despotic state could ever accomplish the workers' emancipation" was exposed. He stated explicitly the need to replace the Prussian state with one which embodied the will of the majority a "Peoples State" (Volkstaat). In language designed to get round censorship, this meant only one thing a republic.

In May 1875 the Social Democratic Workers' Party and the General German Workers' Union held a joint congress at Gotha. The Gotha Congress adopted a common programme for a unified workers' party in Germany. After a later congress at Erfurt this party came to be known as the Social Democratic Party (SPD).

Marx and Engels subjected this programme to withering criticism and the thrust of their argument was directed as much against Bebel and Liebknecht as against the Lassalleans.

The demand for state aid to workers' co operatives, Marx and Engels claimed, would have turned the workers' organisations into "pensioners of the King of Prussia". They insisted that all schemes for producer co operatives under capitalism were, at best, limited and short term measures. They were proof that workers could organise production and distribution. But limited in scale by the pressure of the market, by the limited savings of the workers or, worse still, by hand outs from an authoritarian regime they could never transform society.

Indeed, presented as a panacea, cooperatives marked a regression to utopianism, a diversion from the class struggle aimed at taking political power. Only when the workers seized political power and made use of it to expropriate the capitalists' property would it be possible to create a socialist economy, argued Marx and Engels.

Marx and Engels attacked the very term Volkstaat. This surprised Liebknecht and Bebel, as it was the title of their party's paper. As we have seen, it expressed their commitment to a thoroughly democratic transformation to a republic. Yet Marx singled out the following formulation from the programme for an especially heavy attack:

"The Socialist Labour Party of Germany strives with every legal means for the Free State and the Socialist Society."

Marx's criticism of this was twofold. First, it was evasive even as a democratic demand and Germany was a country where democratic tasks were the ones immediately facing the proletariat. Secondly, it failed to observe the key lessons the Paris Commune threw up about the nature of the state the working class would need to achieve a socialist society.

Marx insisted that, henceforth, any scientific socialist programme must point out that a democratic republic is only the "form of state of bourgeois society (in which) the class struggle has to be fought out to a last conclusion."
The democratic republic was not the final goal of the proletariat's struggle but an arena of that final struggle. As a form of state it too was doomed to wither away after the proletariat had concentrated all power (a dictatorship) in its own hands. The Commune had shown that:

"Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. "10

Because of these errors and omissions, Marx and Engels considered the Gotha Programme a "thoroughly objectionable programme that demoralises the party".

The attitude of the Eisenach party leaders to this advice was the scorn of activists who felt they were on the spot and knew what to do. Liebknecht asserted bluntly that, "the party is not under the direction of theoreticians".

But developments after the fusion at Gotha were to prove Marx and Engels right. The aid of the "theoreticians" was needed sooner than Liebknecht could have expected.

**Herr Eugen Duhring...**

In the mid 1 870s there was a considerable influx of bourgeois intellectuals attracted by the size and potential influence of a mass party.

The central party paper opened its pages to all sorts of quacks and charlatans in the realms of economics and philosophy. The most prominent amongst these was the Berlin University Professor Eugen Karl Duhring (1833 1921). Duhring's achievements in the face of disability (he was blind), his courageous stand against the University authorities and the fact that he had openly declared himself a socialist, commended him to many leaders of the SPD.

The bulk of the leaders, journalists and parliamentarians had learned their socialism in the confused and deficient school of Ferdinand Lassalle. Some, like Johan Most, were muddled by semi-anarchist ideas.

This created a receptive medium in which Duhring's influence could spread like a disease throughout the party. The fact that Wilhelm Liebknecht Marx and Engels' longest standing follower in the party leadership was a natural born compromiser did not help matters.

Through his writings and well attended lectures, Duhring began to influence a circle of Social Democratic intellectuals in Berlin, including the young Eduard Bernstein.

Marx and Engels became really alarmed when his influence extended to Johan Most, Social Democratic member of the Reichstag and newspaper editor. When Bebel, hitherto central to the Marxist faction, wrote that one of Duhring's books on political economy was the best thing written since Marx's Capital, Wilhelm Liebknecht at last woke up to the danger.

Panic stricken, he begged Marx and Engels to reply to Duhring, who had begun to attack Marx and, indeed, all previous socialist writers.

Duhring, an incredible egotist, regarded them all from the great utopians like Saint Simon through to Marx as his rivals and as obstacles to his newly concocted "socialitarian" system. And Duhring did not pull his punches. The following accusations against Marx give a flavour of his method of argument:

"impotence of the faculties of concentration and systematisation... deformity of thought and style, undignified affectation of language anglicised vanity... barren conceptions which in fact are only bastards of historical and logical fantasy... deceptive twisting ... personal vanity ... vile mannerisms... snotty... buffoonery pretending to be witty... Chinese erudition... philosophical and scientific backwardness".
Marx was working flat out to complete volumes two, three, and four of Capital. Thus, as Engels wrote:

"As a consequence of the division of labour that existed between Marx and myself, it fell to me to present our opinions in the periodical press, and, therefore, particularly in the fight against opposing views, in order that Marx should have time for the elaboration of his great basic work. Because of this, I had to expound our views in the majority of cases in polemical form, counterpoising them to other views."

Engels decided it was essential not only to defend Marx's life work against Dühring but to win the SPD to the whole range of ideas that he and Marx had worked on since the 1840s.

After the defeat of the Paris Commune the German workers' movement had, for a period at least, taken over the role of vanguard for the whole international movement. Engels believed it was necessary to educate the party leaders and cadres in consistent materialism, in the dialectical method, in the whole scope of Marx's political economy (not just on Volume I of Capital the only part then published). In short he set out to explain scientific socialism and historical materialism.

From September 1876 to June 1878 he wrote a polemic, full of savage humour, which burst the bubble of Dühring's pretentious system. It was carried in instalments in Vorwaerts, the Berlin paper of the SPD. This was then issued in book form in 1878 with the title Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science known for short as Anti-Dühring.

**Anti-Dühring a classic of scientific socialism**

Engels subjected Dühring's self proclaimed system to penetrating criticism. It was no off the cuff polemic; its value long survived the hapless Dühring:

"I was compelled to follow him wherever he went and to oppose my conceptions to his. As a result my negative criticism became positive; the polemic was transformed into a more or less connected exposition of the dialectical method and of the communist world outlook fought for by Marx and myself."

The first result of Anti-Dühring was to make available to a new generation of socialists the basic method which Marx and Engels had developed together in the second half of the 1840s and which Marx had applied in the Critique of Political Economy (1859) and Volume I of Capital (1867).

It also addressed a number of important new challenges for revolutionary theory. It provided the first ever comprehensive presentation of Marxism as an integral body of ideas linked by a scientific method - materialist dialectics.

This was Engels' work but Marx helped both with the planning and even with part of the writing. He helped to collect the necessary material, wrote a critical outline of Dühring's book on the history of economic doctrines, which Engels used in a shortened form as Chapter X of Part II. Finally, Engels read the whole completed manuscript to him.

These facts, obvious from a reading of the two men's letters, were totally consistent with the way Engels helped Marx with his work (including Capital). Yet they have been subject to repeated challenges from those who wish to claim that Marx and Engels had fundamentally different methods.

The most decisive rebuttal of the charge of falsification is the content of Anti-Dühring itself.

**Materialism and the Dialectical Method**

Dühring's theory tried to pass itself off as a form of materialism or determinism. But for Dühring, political force, as opposed to the social relations of production, was the decisive motor force of history.

To refute that view, Engels had to restate Marx's materialist conception of history, that is to outline the basic logic of historical materialism. In addition, because Dühring posed his own theory as a universal one applicable to the natural
world as well as society Engels was obliged to "follow him" into that sphere. This was a task Engels took up with relish touching on subjects as diverse as infantry tactics and Euclidean mathematics.

In the process, Engels outlines the essential difference between Marxist historical materialism the materialist conception of human history and philosophical (or dialectical) materialism, which encompasses the whole of nature. At the same time, Engels shows the fundamental similarity of the dialectical processes at work in both social history and nature. Engels' contemporary researches and commentaries on natural science were later published in the 1920s as The Dialectics of Nature. 14

Engels' book was built on the foundations laid by himself and Marx from the mid 1840s up to the mid 1870s. It is based, most notably, upon The German Ideology.

Engels drew on his own and Marx's extensive reading, knowledge of philosophy, political economy, history, anthropology, and on his own researches into natural science and military affairs.

Many of these areas of interest he shared fully with Marx. Not only economics and politics, but also biology and anthropology. Marx was no less enthusiastic about the works of Charles Darwin and Lewis Morgan than was Engels. Written proof exists in large quantities that both men saw the work of such thinkers as confirming the dialectical and historical materialist method.

In the introduction to Anti-Duhring, Engels outlines in brief the development of the theoretical starting point and method of scientific socialism. While giving full recognition to the merits of the great utopians, Saint Simon, Fourier and Owen, he stresses that, for them:

"socialism is the expression of absolute truth, reason and justice and has only to be discovered to conquer all the world by virtue of its own power."15

In contrast to the utopians, Marx rooted socialism in the development and transcendence of the capitalist mode of production and the class struggle to which it gave rise. Only on this basis could a consistent materialism be achieved.

The old utopians, like the eighteenth century materialists, were unable to extend their materialism into the realm of human thought and the development of ideas.

"Now," writes Engels, "idealism was driven from its last refuge, the philosophy of history... and a method found of explaining man's 'knowing' by his 'being', instead of, as heretofore, his 'being' by his 'knowing'.16

Engels asserted that it was Marx's two great discoveries, the materialist understanding of history and the theory of surplus value, which laid the theoretical foundations of a truly scientific socialism.

By "scientific" Engels did not mean to claim that Marxism was some sort of natural science. Rather, Engels repeatedly distinguishes between the spheres of natural history, human history and human thought, without, of course, failing to appreciate their interconnections.

In Part I of Anti-Duhring Engels explains a consistently materialist approach to the solution of the fundamental problem posed by previous philosophies.

Engels' contends, against Duhring, that:

"the unity of the world does not consist in its being... Being, indeed is always an open question beyond the point where our sphere of observation ends. The real unity of the world, and this is proved, not by a few juggled phrases, but by a long and wearisome development of philosophy and natural science, consists in its materiality."17

Thinking is both a part and a product of a material universe which exists prior to and independent of our ability to
perceive it. The laws of thinking, whether they be formal logic or dialectics, must correspond to the objects of thought, the world, the universe and its laws. Engels insists that, "to me, there could be no question of building the laws of dialectics into nature, but of discovering them in it and evolving them from it."18

Engels shows the inseparable relationship between matter and motion:

"Motion is the mode of existence of matter. Never anywhere has there been matter without motion... All rest, all equilibrium, is only relative, only has meaning in relation to one or another definite form of motion."19

The world is in constant motion, constant change. Nature proceeds not only by long phases of evolutionary development but sometimes by leaps in which new phenomena appear which both destroy and preserve previous ones. Dialectics is the only possible means of adequately understanding it. Metaphysical modes of thinking are quite useless:

"To the metaphysician, things and their mental reflexes, ideas, are isolated, are to be considered one after the other and apart from each other, are objects of investigation fixed, rigid, given once for all."20

The dialectical method takes things and their thought reflections in their mutual connections, in movement, in emergence and disappearance.

Modern critics of Marxism make much of the "reflection" image, suggesting that Engels means that mental life, consciousness, is passive exactly like an image in a mirror.

This was, of course, the view held by the pre Marxist materialists of the eighteenth century, such as the French philosopher Diderot who compared the human brain to a wax drum upon which external things left their imprint. But Engels, like Marx, saw cognition as an interactive process.

Engels placed enormous stress on labour (i.e. human practice) not only as the modifier of external nature but as the modifier of Man as a species and, in particular, human consciousness.

But he insisted that being is prior to thinking. Without this approach no consistent materialist standpoint is possible.

Engels examines in detail the law of the unity and struggle of opposites, the transformation of quantitative changes into qualitative ones, and the law of negation of the negation.

Subsequent anti Engels "Marxists" have stigmatised this law as so much mysticism and confusion. In fact, the only person likely to be confused and mystified by it is a hopeless empiricist.

Engels shows that, in contrast to the usual common sense conception of negation as outright destruction or cancelling, a dialectical negation involves the preservation of certain qualities of the thing negated; these qualities themselves become embodied in a new entity. Engels demonstrates, with copious examples drawn from mathematics, natural and social science and economics, that this is a general feature of all development.

The law of the negation of the negation, writes Engels, is "an extremely general and for this reason extremely far reaching and important law of development of nature, history, and thought."

Engels also examines how a dialectical understanding differs from the metaphysical understanding of key philosophical terms: necessity and chance, essence and appearance, causality and interaction. Centrally, he explains the Marxist theory of cognition, rejecting the idea that any philosophical system can obtain absolute truth.

Duhring's claim that his system is an exception is exposed as an unacknowledged theft from Hegel's idealism. Engels shows that all truth is relative but no less scientifically knowable for that.

Truth can only be established through interaction with the objective world. In the natural sciences this is done by observation, analysis and experiment. In the historical (social) sciences it has to be done through the gathering of
economic and political data, analysing it and verifying it in theory guided practice.

Criticising Duhring's subjective and voluntaristic views, Engels examined the correlation between freedom and determination.

He showed graphically the dialectical interrelation of these two opposed or polar categories. He shows that freedom is in fact based on the understanding of necessity, (i.e. of the determinants arising from both natural and social conditions). It lies in the active use of the objective laws of nature and society to modify and transform both nature and society:

"Freedom does not consist in any dreamt of independence of natural laws, but in the knowledge of these laws, and in the possibility this gives of systematically making them work to definite goals.

This holds good in relation to the laws of external nature and to those which govern the bodily and mental existence of men themselves ... Freedom therefore consists in the control over ourselves and over external nature, a control founded on knowledge of natural necessity; it is therefore necessarily a product of historical development."22

The historic "leap forward in the development of the productive forces", which capitalism has achieved, "alone makes possible a society in which there are no longer class distinctions or anxiety over the means of subsistence for the individual and in which for the first time there can be talk of real human freedom, of an existence in harmony with the laws of nature that have become known."23

Engels' critics, who claim that he was a passive optimist, are profoundly mistaken. There is no rigid determinism in his thinking, which leads to either a pessimistic or an optimistic passivity. Engels simply insists that social development has created conditions where our notions of freedom are realisable by the productive forces brought into existence by historic development.

But it is humanity alone, and in particular certain classes within humanity, which can realise or frustrate this possibility.

The Political Economy of Capitalism and Socialism

Duhring's socialism, like that of so many other charlatans and misleaders, before and after, essentially amounted to a critique of capitalist distribution, not production. Engels rebutted Duhring's theory with a didactic restatement of the fundamentals of Marx's political economy. It was in this form that a whole generation of socialists first learned about the revolutionary critique of capitalism.

The economics section of Anti-Duhring draws on the achievements of Marx's life work in political economy. Engels used and popularised not only Volume I of Capital but also the ideas of Marx contained in, at that time unpublished, economic manuscripts above all in those of 1857–1858 (Grundrisse) and those of 1861–1863.11 He also defended and explained the positions which Marx set out in the Critique of the Gotha Programme.

Engels explains simply and clearly the importance of Marx's discoveries about necessary labour time, use and exchange value, capital and surplus value. In the absence of volumes II and III of Capital Anti-Duhring was an added contribution to the published political economy of Marxism. Engels was able for the first time to show that the bedrock of scientific socialism lies in Marx's demonstration of the nature of capitalist exploitation as the appropriation of surplus value.

Engels gives a clear overview of the theory of capitalist crises (a theory only briefly touched upon in Capital Volume I) insisting that they are crises of overproduction, not of a lack of consumption power by the masses, but of a superabundance of capital and the inability to apply it to the exploitation of living labour power:

"In these crises the contradiction between socialised production and capitalist appropriation ends in a violent explosion. The circulation of commodities is, for the time being, stopped. Money, the means of circulation, becomes a hindrance
to circulation. All the laws of production and circulation of commodities are turned upside down. The economic collision has reached its apogee. The mode of production is in rebellion against the mode of exchange, the productive forces are in rebellion against the mode of production, which they have outgrown. "25

Engels also draws attention to the latest developments within capitalism which were to become central features in the era of monopoly capitalism imperialism.

He notes the emergence and domination of the economy by huge joint stock companies and the transfer of whole branches of the economy into state ownership. Engels asks what attitude the working class should take to this process. His answer added a vital new ingredient to the Marxist programme.

He stresses that these developments will not change the capitalist character of production either in these sectors or in the economy as a whole:

"But the transformation, either into joint stock companies, or into state ownership, does not do away with the capitalistic nature of the productive forces... The modern state, no matter what its form, is essentially a capitalist machine, the state of the capitalists, the ideal personification of the total national capital

The workers remain wage workers proletarians. The capitalist relation is not done away with. It is rather brought to a head... State ownership of the productive forces is not the solution of the conflict, but concealed within it are the technical conditions that form the elements of that solution. "25

Engels explains why revolutionaries should support the concentration of the means of production in state hands, state capitalist nationalisation without believing for a moment that this is socialism, or that a process of reform will gradually lead to its disappearance.

Engels in Anti-Duhring also deals, at greater length than he or Marx had done hitherto, with the economic nature of the future communist society. In the process, Engels formulated for the first time in their modern, conceptually different forms, the ideas of communism, socialism and the transition to socialism.

This theoretical framework was to be a vital weapon in the hands of the Bolsheviks, during the first years after the revolution, as they struggled against both the remnants of capitalism and against those in their own party who thought they could "leap" straight to communism.

Engels suggests a number of key measures which are necessary if the law of value is to be suppressed as the regulator of production and distribution.

He draws attention to the planned nature of its development after the working class takes power and the crisis free mutual interaction of production and distribution which will then be possible: "Distribution, writes Engels, "will be regulated by the interests of production, and ... production is most encouraged by a mode of distribution which allows all members of society to develop, maintain and exercise their capacities with maximum universality. "27

He speaks of the necessity for a rational distribution of productive forces and predicts certain features which must be inherent in labour under communism.

The new relations of production will exclude the "exploitation of man by man and will overcome anarchy in production. But they will not, at first, abolish inequality.

For that, the growth of productive forces has to accelerate. By finally overcoming scarcity the cause of all forms of social inequality a higher phase of socialism, communism, will be reached.

The unforeseen damaging effects on nature, which all class societies have wrought, can be avoided.

The power of humanity over nature will cease to be that of a destructive tyrant and will become that of a careful
planner. The negative consequences of the division of labour for the free development of the individual will disappear. Labour will be changed from an onerous burden into the first demand of a fruitful life. The antitheses between mental and physical labour, between town and country will disappear. Education will be combined with labour.

Engels goes on to explain the theory of the state that he and Marx had worked out, or rather completed, as a result of the experience of the Paris Commune and the debates with the anarchists in the early 1870s.

The dictatorship of the proletariat is a temporary stage. As classes wither away, so organised social coercion will disappear too:

"the government of persons will be replaced by the administration of things and by conduct of processes of production. The state is not 'abolished'. It dies out." 28

Under communism, people will become the real and conscious masters both of nature and society:

"The extraneous objective forces that have hitherto governed history pass under the control of man himself. Only from that time will man himself, with full consciousness, make his own history... It is humanity's leap from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom." 29

Religion will thus disappear as humanity comes to understand and direct both nature and its own social life, Engels writes. It will not need to be suppressed or abolished.

Engels' work resulted not only in the destruction of Duhring's influence over the German Social Democrats. It also led to the rapid adoption of Marxism by the leading representatives of the growing working class movement on the continent and, later, throughout the world.

On their own admission, it was through this book that many of the leaders of the Second and Third Internationals were won to Marxism's world outlook. For the first time, under one cover, was a text that combined a scientific method, a critique of exploitation and a strategic and tactical guide to the class struggle.

To the modern reader, aspects of this book look quaint. It is not the complexity of some of its language which affronts modern academics however they are used to impenetrable "post modernist discourses". What affronts them is Engels' willingness to apply the Marxist method within its self defined limitations in order to contextualise and understand the major advances in natural science which were taking place. In a book which deals with philosophy, economics, physics and military history they see only the work of a "system builder", a philosophical amateur.

Perhaps, had he lived today, when not even the most adventurous economists, natural scientists and philosophers really dare to stray into each others' realms, Engels would have been obliged to structure such a work differently. Certainly and Engels would have recognised this without hesitation some of the scientific data and theory he leans upon has been superseded by later research.

But Anti-Duhring stands the test of time as one of the building blocks of scientific socialism. Its basic components were used by the Bolsheviks in their debates over everything from economic policy to military strategy within the Red Army.

In both of these spheres the essential lessons are that socialism is possible because it can take advantage of decaying capitalism, that socialism is built on the foundations of capitalism and that it must conquer capitalist technique before humanity can make a "leap into freedom".

Before Marxism, men and women dreamed of socialism the way the ancients dreamed of human flight. They mythologised it, idealised it and yearned for it, but had no idea of how to get it. Marx and Engels did not "invent" the road to socialism they discovered it in the inner laws of capitalism, just as the early aviators discovered how to fly by
mastering the laws of aerodynamics and gravity. They discovered, too, that the modes of thinking which best reflect reality whether in the aircraft designer's laboratory or in the revolutionary party share common laws.

The scientific nature of socialism, the dialectical materialist nature of all that is true and objective in science this is the subject matter of Anti-Duhring.

Its claims drive the modern apologists of capitalism from the cabinet minister to the chemistry professor to distraction.

But they are true and their final proof will be found in the destruction of the capitalist system. There is no better way to commemorate the memory of the cofounder of Marxism than to read his greatest work and to renew the struggle to which Engels dedicated his life.

Endnotes
2 N Levine, The Tragic Deception: Marx contra Engels, Santa Barbara, 1975
4 F Engels, Anti-Duhring, in "Marx and Engels Collected Works" (MECW), Vol 25, pp 5 309
6 "Amendment to Statutes of the IWMA, 7(a)", MECW Vol 23, p 243
7 Engels to Friedrich Adolph Sorge, 12 September 1874, MECW, Vol 45, p 42
8 August Bebel (1840 1913). These articles were later collected as a pamphlet entitled "Our Goals".
9 "Critique of the Gotha Programme", MECW Vol 24, p 96
10 ibid. p 95 (emphasis in original)
11 MECW Vol 25, p 32
12 MECW Vol 26, p 427
13 Preface to the second edition, London September 1885, MECW, Vol 25, p 8
15 "Anti-Duhring", MECW, Vol 25, p 20
16 ibid pp 26 27
17 ibid p 41
18 ibid pp 12 13
19 ibid p 55 (emphasis in original)
20 ibid p 22
21 ibid p 131
22 ibid p 105
23 ibid p 106
24 See MECW, Vols 28 34
25 MECW Vol 25, p 263 (emphasis in original)
26 ibid pp 265 6 27 ibid p 186 28 ibid p 267 29 ibid p 270
   d p 186 28 ibid p 267 29 ibid p 270

Source URL: https://fifthinternational.org/content/engels-1820-1895-struggle-scientific-socialism