

# Friedrich Engels

GERMAN PHILOSOPHER

WRITTEN BY: [Oscar J. Hammen](#)

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**Friedrich Engels**, (born Nov. 28, 1820, Barmen, Rhine province, Prussia [Germany]—died Aug. 5, 1895, London, Eng.), German socialist philosopher, the closest [collaborator](#) of [Karl Marx](#) in the foundation of modern [communism](#). They coauthored ***The Communist Manifesto*** (1848), and Engels edited the second and third volumes of ***Das Kapital*** after Marx's death.

## TOP QUESTIONS

What did Friedrich Engels do for a living? 

When did Friedrich Engels get married? 

What did Friedrich Engels write? 

Why is Friedrich Engels famous? 



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## Early Life

Engels grew up in the [environment](#) of a family marked by strong political views, a steadfast loyalty to [Prussia](#), and a pronounced [Protestant](#) faith.



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His father was the owner of a textile factory in Barmen and also a partner in the Ermen & Engels cotton plant in [Manchester](#), Eng. Even after Engels openly pursued the revolutionary goals that threatened the traditional values of the family, he usually could count on financial aid from home. The influence of his mother, to whom he was devoted, may have been a factor in preserving the tie between father and son.

Aside from such disciplinary actions as the father considered necessary in rearing a gifted but somewhat rebellious son, the only instance in which his father forced his will on Engels was in deciding upon a career for him. Engels did attend a ***Gymnasium*** (secondary school), but he dropped out a year before graduation, probably because his father felt that his plans for the future were too undefined. Engels showed some skill in writing poetry, but his father insisted that he go to work in the expanding business. Engels, accordingly, spent the next three years (1838–41) in Bremen acquiring practical business experience in the offices of an export firm.

In Bremen, Engels began to show the capacity for living the double life that characterized his middle years. During regular hours, he operated effectively as a business apprentice. An outgoing person, he joined a choral society, frequented the famed Ratskeller tavern, became an expert swimmer, and practiced fencing and riding (he outrode most Englishmen in the fox hunts). Engels also cultivated his capacity for learning languages; he boasted to his sister that he knew 24. In private, however, he developed an interest in liberal and revolutionary works, notably the banned writings of “Young German” authors such as Ludwig Börne, [Karl Gutzkow](#), and [Heinrich Heine](#). But he soon rejected them as undisciplined and inconclusive in favour of the more systematic and all embracing [philosophy](#) of [G.W.F. Hegel](#) as expounded by the “[Young Hegelians](#),” a group of leftist intellectuals, including the theologian and historian Bruno Bauer and the anarchist [Max Stirner](#). They accepted the Hegelian [dialectic](#)—basically that rational progress and historical change result from the conflict of opposing views, ending in a new synthesis. The Young Hegelians were bent on accelerating the process, which they considered irrational, outmoded, and repressive. As their first assault was directed



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against the foundations of [Christianity](#), they helped convert an [agnostic](#) Engels into a militant [atheist](#), a relatively easy task since by this time Engels's revolutionary [convictions](#) made him ready to strike out in almost any direction.

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In Bremen, Engels also demonstrated his talent for journalism by publishing articles under the pseudonym of Friedrich Oswald, perhaps to spare the feelings of his family. He possessed pungent critical abilities and a clear style, qualities that were utilized later by Marx in [articulating](#) their revolutionary goals.

After returning to Barmen in 1841, the question of a future career was shelved temporarily when Engels enlisted as a one-year volunteer in an artillery regiment in Berlin. No antimilitarist [disposition](#) prevented him from serving commendably as a recruit; in fact, military matters later became one of his specialties. In the future, friends would often address him as “the general.” Military service allowed Engels time for more compelling interests in Berlin. Though he lacked the formal requirements, he attended lectures at the university. His Friedrich Oswald articles gained him entrée into the Young Hegelian circle of The Free, formerly the Doctors Club frequented by Karl Marx. There he gained recognition as a [formidable](#) protagonist in philosophical battles, mainly directed against religion.

## Conversion To Communism

After his discharge in 1842, Engels met [Moses Hess](#), the man who converted him to communism. Hess, the son of wealthy Jewish parents and a promoter of radical causes and publications, demonstrated to Engels that the logical consequence of the Hegelian philosophy and dialectic was communism. Hess also stressed the role that England, with its advanced industry, burgeoning [proletariat](#), and portents of [class](#) conflict, was destined to play in future upheavals. Engels had the opportunity to go to England, ostensibly to continue his family firm in Manchester.



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In England (1842–44), Engels again functioned successfully as a businessman. After business hours, however, he pursued his real interests: writing articles on communism for continental and English journals, reading books and parliamentary reports on economic and political conditions in England, mingling with workers, meeting radical leaders, and gathering materials for a projected history of England that would stress the rise of industry and the wretched position of the workers.

In Manchester, Engels established an enduring attachment to Mary Burns, an uneducated Irish working girl, and, though he rejected the institution of marriage, they lived together as husband and wife. In fact, the one serious strain in the Marx-Engels friendship occurred when Mary died in 1863 and Engels thought that Marx responded a little too casually to the news of her death. In the future, however, Marx made a point of being more considerate, and, when Engels later lived with Mary's sister Lizzy, on similar terms, Marx always carefully closed his letters with greetings to "Mrs. Lizzy" or "Mrs. Burns." Engels finally married Lizzy, but only as a deathbed concession to her.

In 1844 Engels contributed two articles to the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* ("German-French Yearbooks"), which were edited by Marx in Paris. In them Engels put forth an early version of the principles of scientific [socialism](#). He revealed what he regarded as the contradictions in liberal economic doctrine and set out to prove that the existing system based on private [property](#) was leading to a world made up of "millionaires and paupers." The revolution that would follow would lead to the elimination of private property and to a "reconciliation of humanity with nature and itself."



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## Friedrich Engels

### QUICK FACTS



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**BORN**

November 28, 1820

[Barmen, Germany](#)

**DIED**

August 5, 1895 (aged 74)

**NOTABLE WORKS**

["The Communist Manifesto"](#)

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