The concept of a proletarian party occupies a central position in the political thought and activity of Marx and Engels. "Against the collective power of the propertied classes", they argued, "the working class cannot act as a class except by constituting itself into a political party distinct from, and opposed to, all old parties formed from the propertied classes." This was "indispensable in order to ensure the triumph of the social revolution, and its ultimate end, the abolition of classes."

Yet nowhere do the authors of the Manifesto of the Communist Party set out in systematic form a theory of the proletarian party, its nature and its characteristics any more than they do for social class or for the state, to both of which it is closely related. Moreover, within the broad general framework of their theory of class struggle and of revolution, they evolved their ideas on the forms and functions of proletarian parties as they went along, and related them to their analyses of often very different historical situations. They did not work out in advance any "plan" for the creation of a revolutionary proletarian party to which their subsequent theoretical work was geared; and at no time did they themselves establish a political party. Having already by the beginning of 1844 come theoretically to see the proletariat as the leading force for social emancipation, they were to base themselves on existing organizations created by advanced sections of that class and to condemn as sectarianism any attempt to impose preconceived organizational forms on the working class movement from outside. In the sphere of party building, Marx could have said as Molière did of the plots of his plays: "Je prends mon bien où je le trouve."

Although members and leaders of party organizations for only a few years, Marx and Engels devoted a considerable amount of time, particularly in the latter parts of their lives, to giving advice on the programmes and development of workers' parties in various countries, seeing themselves as occupying a "special status as representatives of international Socialism" and of "the general staff of the Party". When we examine the totality of these party activities and views on parties spread over half a century, we are faced with a considerable variety
and complexity embodying at first sight a number of contradictions. Moreover, our difficulty is increased by the fact that during the lifetimes of Marx and Engels the whole notion of a political party was to develop and change along with the forms of activity open to it; and, as we shall see, they were to use the term in several different senses, without defining them. It has therefore been quite possible to draw selectively on their activities and above all their writings in support of the most opposite versions of their views.

An understanding of the ideas of Marx and Engels on proletarian parties is only possible if they are set in each case in their widely varying historical and semantic contexts. This I shall attempt to do by examining the major “models” of the party in their work, each of which corresponds to a stage or stages in the development of the working class movement in a given period or in given countries. These I take as: (a) the small international Communist cadres' organization (the League of Communists—1847-52); (b) the “party” without an organization (during the ebb of the labour movement—1850s and early '60s); (c) the broad international federation of workers' organizations (the First International—1864-72); (d) the Marxist national mass party (German Social Democracy—1870s, '80s and early '90s); (e) the broad national labour party (Britain and America—1880s and early '90s) based on the Chartist model. I have chosen to examine the views of Marx and Engels together for they were in fundamental agreement on all the questions discussed here; and over an important period, in keeping with a division of labour agreed between them, Engels dealt on behalf of both of them with requests for political advice from all over the world, continuing and extending this work after Marx's death into the era of the Second International.

II

Having found themselves in 1844-45 in agreement on some of the basic principles of Marxism, Marx and Engels were to embark on a lifetime collaboration involving both the further development of their theoretical ideas and the attempt “to win over the European and in the first place the German proletariat”.* From the beginning of 1846, based on Brussels, they initiated the setting up of Communist Correspondence Committees, notably in Belgium, Britain, France and Germany. These were to concern themselves with the internal affairs of what Engels was later to call “the Communist Party in the process of formation”; though in this period both he and Marx were speaking of “the Communist Party” and “our party” in the traditional sense of a société de pensée—however with them it was seen as expressing the interests of a class—rather than a political organization in anything
approaching the modern sense. Among those who received the litho­
graphed circulars and pamphlets issued from Brussels were the leaders
of the League of the Just which, formed in 1836, was a small inter­
national secret society, consisting mainly of German artisans, that in
recent years had particularly concerned itself with setting up and work­
ning within workers' educational associations. This was the organization
that Marx and Engels now entered on the invitation of its leaders who
indicated that they were convinced of the general correctness of their
views and agreed to their stipulation that the old conspiratorial forms
related to the organization's Blanquist past should be scrapped.11 At
a congress in the summer of 1847, it was reorganized as the League of
Communists, adopting new rules giving it official Communist aims at
a second congress at the end of the year. A new and thoroughly demo­
cratic constitution laid down that annual congresses were "the legis­
lative authority of the League" and provided for the electivity,
accountability and revocability at any time by their electors of all lead­
ing committees.12 It was as a "detailed theoretical and practical pro­
gramme" of the League13 that Marx and Engels were commissioned
to write their famous Manifesto of the Communist Party.

The Communist League was an international association of workers
in a number of Western European countries, in which Germans pre­
dominated and which paid special attention to Germany.14 Although
"for ordinary peace times at least" it was seen by Marx and Engels as
"a pure propaganda society",15 it was forced by the conditions of the
time to operate as a secret society during most of the five years of its
existence. It had its origins, wrote Engels in 1892, in "two independent
currents": on the one hand "a pure workers' movement" and, on the
other, "a theoretical movement, stemming from the disintegration of
Hegelian philosophy", associated predominantly with Marx. "The
Communist Manifesto of 1848," he goes on, "marks the fusion of both
currents".18

In the Manifesto are set out some of the basic ingredients of
Marx's and Engels' conception of the party. It puts forward the
Communists' claim to leadership of the working class by virtue of their
superior theoretical consciousness, which belongs to the essence of this
conception. The previous year in his polemic against Proudhon, Marx
had described the Socialists and Communists as "the theoreticians of
the proletarian class".17 Now he and Engels present the Communists
as the theoretical vanguard of the class which has "no interests separate
and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole" and does not "set
up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and
mould the proletarian movement". They were distinguished from "the
other working class parties" only in that in national struggles "they
point out and bring to the forefront the common interests of the entire
proletariat, independent of all nationality" and that, in the various stages of the struggle against the bourgeoisie, "they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole". They were in their practice "the most advanced and resolute section of the working class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others", whilst in their theory they had "over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement", which they conceived as "the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority".

When Marx and Engels speak in the Manifesto of the "organization of the proletarians into a class, and consequently into a political party", they clearly have in mind the English model which Marx had described in The Poverty of Philosophy the year before. Here he had shown how in their struggle, first in trade unions and then also by constituting "a large political party under the name of Chartists", the mass of workers had developed from an amorphous, fragmented, potential class an sich into a fully-fledged, national class für sich engaged of necessity in political struggle.

At the primitive stage of development and organization of the working class on the continent at this time with the Communist League as a tiny cadres' organization of some 200-300 members spread throughout Western Europe, the Manifesto indicated that "the Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working class parties." In fact at this time there was only one workers' party organized on a national scale, the Chartists and the British Communists, Julian Harney and Ernest Jones worked in it as leaders of its left wing. In other countries, the members of the League were to join such parties as the French Social Democrats of Ledru-Rollin and Louis Blanc, which Marx described as "a coalition between petty bourgeois and workers". In Germany in the 1848 revolution they joined the Democratic Party, "the party of the petty bourgeoisie", whose most advanced wing they formed until the spring of 1849. Whilst the form of these tactics was dictated by the circumstances of the time, they do contain an element which is common to all their party models: the avoidance of sectarian isolation, the finding of fields of work where the Communists can get "the ear of the working class."

It must be clear from the above that the Communist League, an international secret society comprising "only a small core" of militants, cannot be described as a political party even in the usual sense in which the term was most frequently used at the time and is applied in the Manifesto itself to the large national organizations in which the Communists were to work. As the Soviet Marx scholar E. P. Kandel
argues in one of the regrettably few books published on the League, Marx and Engels saw the League only as "the germ, the nucleus" of their party, notwithstanding the fact that they called its programme the Manifesto of the Communist Party.\textsuperscript{34} The conditions of the time, he writes, "did not provide possibilities for the League of Communists to turn into a real party".\textsuperscript{35} A glance at the League's rôle in the revolution of 1848-49 will bear this out.

Returning to Germany in the spring of 1848 after the start of the revolution, together with the bulk of League members who had been living abroad, Marx and Engels went to Cologne. After initially getting the League's Central Committee operating from there, they appear to have concentrated all their efforts from about the middle of May on the production of the Neue Rheinische Zeitung. This famous radical daily paper, whose first number appeared on 1 June, campaigned under the editorship of Marx for a determined struggle to carry through to the end the democratic tasks in this bourgeois democratic revolution. Seeing the very great difficulties for the League in issuing directives to its dispersed supporters, Marx and Engels concluded that "such directives were . . . much better disseminated through the press."\textsuperscript{36} In recent years, a bitter controversy has raged between Boris Nicolaevsky, the old Menshevik who died in America in 1966, and E. P. Kandel around the alleged dissolution of the League in the summer of 1848.\textsuperscript{37} Whether in fact Marx used special discretionary powers (bestowed on him at the beginning of the revolution) to dissolve the League in June 1848, as Nicolaevsky alleges on the basis of the prison deposition of P. G. Roser,\textsuperscript{38} one of those sentenced at the Cologne trial of League leaders in 1852,\textsuperscript{39} or whether, as Kandel argues, the possibility of such a dissolution is contradicted by the "high evaluation of the past rôle of the League throughout the whole period of 1847-52 given by Marx and Engels"\textsuperscript{40}, who never in their accounts of the League's activity referred to such a dissolution,\textsuperscript{41} we shall probably never know for certain. Unless further research brings some new documents to light we shall have to make up our minds on the balance of probabilities. There is however no dispute on the fact that, as Engels testified later, "the few hundred League members vanished in the enormous mass that had been suddenly hurled into the movement".\textsuperscript{42} Kandel accepts that in the summer of 1848 the Cologne Central Committee ceased to function and was (in late August or September, he now thinks) dissolved and its powers transferred to the London District Committee.\textsuperscript{43} Further, Soviet historians accept as "credible" Roser's account of a meeting that he attended in the spring of 1849 between Marx and Joseph Moll\textsuperscript{44} who had been sent by the new London Central Committee to reorganize the League in Germany.\textsuperscript{45}
According to Röser, Marx "declared that with the existing freedom of speech and of the press the League was superfluous".40

A number of contemporary Marxist historians have unfortunately found it necessary to interpret these tactics in terms of a later Marxian, and a fortiori Leninist, concept of the party. They therefore argue that "the editorial staff of the Neue Rheinische Zeitung was the political centre of leadership of the proletarian party in Germany, of the Communist League";47 "the true general staff of the proletarian party";48 to which "now fell in practice the tasks of the Central Committee of the Communist League".49 In the accounts of the history of the League and the Neue Rheinische Zeitung that Marx and Engels wrote in the 1860s and '80s there are no such anachronistic formulations to be found. Nor for that matter are there in Lenin, a keen student of the history of Marxism, who wrote in 1905: "It was only in April 1849, after the revolutionary newspaper had been published for almost a year . . . that Marx and Engels declared themselves in favour of a special workers' organization! Until then they were merely running an 'organ of democracy' unconnected by any organizational ties with an independent workers' party. This fact, monstrous and incredible from our present-day standpoint, clearly shows us what an enormous difference there is between the German workers' party of those days and the present Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party."50

April 1849, as Lenin indicates in the passage quoted, was to see an important change in Marx's and Engels' revolutionary strategy. Marx and other Communists issued a statement announcing their resignation from the Rhineland District Committee of the Democratic Associations and urging "a closer union of workers' associations" of which a national congress was planned.51 They appear to have concluded that the German workers had now developed sufficient political experience for it to be a practical proposition to work for a broad mass workers' party based on the workers' associations and independent of the petty bourgeois Democrats with their "indecision, weakness and cowardice".52 It was too late however for these plans to get off the ground. The outbreak of the insurrection in South and West Germany (Reichsverfassungskampagne) was to begin soon afterwards and its defeat by mid-July signified the the end of the German revolution.

Most of the old leaders of the League came together again in exile in London in the autumn of 1849 where the Central Committee was reconstituted and proceeded to reorganize the League in Germany, of necessity as a secret society. On the assumption that "a new revolution is impending"53 Marx and Engels drew up their famous Address of March 1850 on behalf of the League's Central Committee.54 It notes that in the two years of revolution, although the League's members as individuals had stood in the forefront of the struggle, the "former firm
organization of the League was considerably slackened". Whilst the
democratic party had organized itself more and more in Germany,
"the workers' party" (by which they here must mean either the labour
movement as a whole or the general interest of the proletariat as a
class) "lost its only firm foothold" (by which the Communist League is
meant). The conclusion that is drawn as the leitmotif of the 11-page
address is: "An end must be put to this state of affairs, the independ­
ence of the workers must be restored", and they must not allow them­selves to be drawn into a large opposition party embracing all shades
of democratic opinion. "The workers, and above all the League,
"must exert themselves to establish an independent, secret and
public organization of the workers' party". The League would
clearly form the secret organization and its branches should become
"the central point and nucleus of workers' associations in which the
attitude and interests of the proletariat will be discussed independently
of bourgeois influences". These workers' associations, existing
throughout Germany and normally of a social, cultural and educational
character, would provide the broad mass basis and public organization
of the independent workers' party that was to be created. After the
expected democratic revolution, the workers must contest elecions to
a national assembly with their own independent candidates, consisting
"as far as possible of members of the League".

Eduard Bernstein started the fashion, now followed among others
by Mr. George Lichtheim and Professor Bertram Wolfe of describ­
ing the March Address as "Blanquist". Yet the concept of party and
revolution is certainly very far from being Blanquist in the normally
accepted sense of the term, though there are indeed points of con­
vergence with Blanqui's tactics in 1848, which were in a number of
ways untypical, and with the forms of struggle foreseen for the forth­
coming revolution by the emigre Blanquists with whom Marx and
Engels concluded a short-lived agreement in 1850. What the Address
makes quite clear is that what it envisages is not a putsch carried out
by a revolutionary elite but the organizing of the most broadly based
workers' party, which in the next revolution will march together with
the petty bourgeois democrats, whom it will help bring to power and
then push forward to make the maximum inroads into capitalist
property. In the "revolutionary excitement that the workers should
keep alive as long as possible", they "must attempt to organize them­selves independently as a proletarian guard" with commanders and
a general staff elected by themselves. It is significant, as Dr. Rudolf
Schlesinger has noted, that the Address, which was confidential, does
not suggest that these detachments should be subordinated to Com­
munist control, but indicates rather that they should "put themselves
at the command ... of revolutionary community councils" which the
workers will have established.\textsuperscript{50} The Address recognizes that the German workers will need to go through “a lengthy revolutionary development” before they themselves taking power, and stresses the need for their “clarifying their minds as to what their class interests are”;\textsuperscript{51} with the obvious implication that the League should function as a propaganda society.

When in the late summer of 1850 Marx concluded that European capitalism had entered a period of prosperity and there would be no new revolution in the period ahead, he was faced with opposition from an important section of League members headed by Willich and Schapper. Combatting their voluntarism he said that, instead of studying the real conditions, they had made “the will alone into the driving force of revolution”.\textsuperscript{52} The League in London split on this issue and the Central Committee was transferred back to Cologne where it functioned for a while until its members were arrested and, in November 1852, sentenced by a Cologne court. Shortly afterwards the League in London was dissolved on Marx’s proposal and its “continuation on the continent declared to be no longer opportune”.\textsuperscript{53}

III

After the split in the Communist League in the autumn of 1850 and even before its formal dissolution two years later, Marx and Engels had begun to withdraw into an “authentic isolation”,\textsuperscript{54} preferring the “position of the independent writer” to that of “the so-called revolutionary party”.\textsuperscript{55} The relief expressed by Marx to Engels on 11 February 1851 at the end of “the system of mutual concessions, of inadequacies endured for the sake of appearances”;\textsuperscript{56} was matched by Engels’ joy two days later that from now on they were responsible to themselves alone.\textsuperscript{57} “How do people like us, who flee official positions like the plague, fit into a ‘party’?” he thunders. “What good to us, who spit on popularity . . . is a ‘party’, i.e. a band of asses who swear by us because they take us for the likes of them?”\textsuperscript{58} Strong words—but it would be wrong, as Franz Mehring says, to take the actual expressions used too seriously,\textsuperscript{59} and totally indefensible to divorce them from their actual context and argue, as Bertram Wolfe does, that they represent their real private opinions about the party to be contrasted with statements made by them thirty and forty years later (some of which he quotes) which were “written for the eyes of others”.\textsuperscript{60} They reflect the frustrations of the first difficult period of exile after the defeat of the revolution and the recognition that no new one was impending. They represent their reaction to the “petty squabbles”\textsuperscript{61} of the emigration,\textsuperscript{62} from which they were withdrawing in order to return to their studies, interrupted since 1848, in the hope of gaining,
above all in the sphere of political economy, “a scientific victory for our party”.

What however was this “party” of which they continued to speak after the dissolution of the Communist League in 1852, in a period when, as Marx wrote to the poet Freiligrath in 1860, he “never again belonged . . . to any secret or public society”, and considered that his “theoretical works were of greater benefit to the working class than participation in associations whose days on the continent were over”?

What we have here is not a party in the normal sense that Engels was using when he indicated in December 1852 that “no political party can exist without an organization”, but rather in the first instance a return to the use of the term that we saw them make in the mid-'40s to designate Marx and the small band broadly sharing his basic views, whom the Prussian police reports as well as Marx's supporters in this period refer to as the “Marx party”.

Already in March 1853, within four months of the dissolution of the League, Marx is writing to Engels: “We must definitely recruit our party afresh”, since the few adherents that he names, despite their qualities, do not add up to a party. They aimed to get this group—“our clique”, as Engels calls them fairly jocularly in a letter to Weydemeyer in America in 1853—to prepare themselves by study for the revolutionary struggles that they were confident lay ahead. Marx was anxious to co-ordinate the public activities of the members of this “party embryo”, as Wilhelm Liebknecht was to call it later. When, in 1859, Lassalle published a pamphlet on the Italian war of that year expressing a point of view with which they disagreed, Marx wrote to Engels criticising their wayward comrade's failure first to apprise himself of their opinion. “We must insist on party discipline or everything will land in the dirt”, he added.

Marx however also spoke of “our party” in a more transcendental sense as when in 1860, in the letter to Freiligrath from which I have already quoted, he counterposed to the party in the “ephemeral sense”, which in the shape of the Communist League had, he said, “ceased to exist for me eight years ago”, “the party in the great historical sense”. The Communist League, like Blanqui's Société des Saisons and hundreds of other societies, “was only an episode in the history of the Party, which is growing everywhere spontaneously from the soil of modern society”. For Marx the party in this sense was the embodiment of his conception of the “mission” of the working class, concentrating in itself “the revolutionary interests of society”, to accomplish “the historical tasks which automatically arose” from its general conditions of existence. It was in this sense also that Marx understood the term “party” when he reported to Engels in 1859 that he had told a deputation from an émigré German workers' group:
"We had received our appointment as representatives of the proletarian party from nobody but ourselves. It was, however, endorsed by the exclusive and universal hatred consecrated to us by all the parties and factions of the old world." Did this statement indicate a "conception of charismatic election" and strains of "prophetism" in Marx? Leaving aside the somewhat arrogant form in which the claim is made (and Marx could certainly be arrogant, especially when in these difficult years of poverty and ill-health he was stung by the follies of some of his fellow-exiles), there remains the idea of Marx and Engels seeing themselves, by virtue of their scientifically evolved theoretical understanding as a *locum tenens* for the German working class party, which for the moment enjoyed only a "theoretical existence". This is however a temporary and exceptional conception for them, a special case in no way typical of the mainstream of their thought, which is found only at this early stage in the life of the still little developed German working class in the hiatus between the disappearance of the Communist League and the appearance of new working class organizations that they were confident would emerge to take its place. They were decidedly not trying to substitute themselves for such organizations which at that time did not exist. After a real movement came once more into existence in the 1860s they never again saw themselves as self-appointed representatives of the proletarian party. On the contrary, wherever a real working class movement existed and struggled against the existing order, even when it was led by people with whom they had strong theoretical differences, they identified themselves with it and saw it as a manifestation of the party "in the great historical sense". Thus Marx was to tell Kugelmann that the Paris Commune was "the most glorious deed of our Party since the June insurrection in Paris" in much the same way that Engels was to refer to the Commune as "without any doubt the child of the International intellectually, although the International did not lift a finger to produce it." In 1892, writing for French Socialists on the movement in Germany, Engels stressed that he was speaking "only in my own name, in no wise in the name of the German party. Only the selected committees and delegates of this party have the right to do that". It is perhaps worth noting that, although in the fifties he saw no basis for an organized workers' party in Germany, he was in 1857 urging that in Britain the Chartist leader Ernest Jones should "form a party, for which he must go to the factory districts". What he had in mind was a recruiting campaign by the National Charter Association in the industrial areas, drawing on the old Chartist traditions, to develop itself into a broadly based working class party in which a leading rôle would be played by Jones himself whom Engels was to
describe on his death in 1869 as "the only educated Englishman who was, at bottom, entirely on our side". Thus even in their years in the wilderness Marx and Engels retained and sought to realize where possible their basic concept of the party as an organization in which Socialist theory fuses with the labour movement.

IV

The formation of the First International in 1864 gave Marx (and somewhat later Engels) the opportunity to break out of their relative isolation and join up with the Western European labour movement that was now reviving on a much wider scale than its continental predecessor of the 1840s. Whilst not abandoning his theoretical work, Marx turned his attention more and more right up to the Hague Congress of 1872 to organizing, uniting and leading this broad international federation of affiliated working class organizations. Like the Communist League, the International was not founded by Marx and Engels but sprang spontaneously from the labour movement of the time, to which by virtue of their theoretical and intellectual pre-eminence they came to give direction and perspective. Unlike the Communist League, however, they did not at any stage regard the International as a Communist Party. Nor did they operate with their supporters as an organized party, fraction or secret society inside the broad framework of the International.

Nonetheless, in speaking in the Inaugural Address of the International of "numbers . . . united by combination and led by knowledge", Marx was broadly paraphrasing his party concept of the fusion of Socialist theory with the labour movement, and in the International especially after the Paris Commune he and Engels were to develop more fully than hitherto their views on party organization. In contrast to the Communist League with its advanced theoretical programme, Marx framed the International's programme—the preamble to its Rules that he drew up—"in a form acceptable from the present standpoint of the workers' movement", as he told Engels. This movement had to embrace the Liberal leaders of the British trade unions, the French, Italian and Spanish Proudhonists and the German Lassalleans. It admitted both individual members and affiliated organizations. The principle that it should "let every section freely shape its own theoretical programme" led Marx to propose the acceptance of the sections of Bakunin's International Alliance of Socialist Democracy into the International, which it applied to enter in 1868, despite his very strong objections to its programme and suspicions from the outset of Bakunin's motives in joining.

In the early years of the International, in drawing up its documents, Marx restricted himself "to those points which allow of immediate
agreement and concerted action by the workers and give direct nourishment and impetus to the requirements of the class struggle and the organization of the workers into a class”. He realized at the start that it would “take time before the reawakened movement allows the old boldness of speech”. However, relying “for the ultimate triumph of the ideas set forth in the Manifesto... solely and exclusively upon the intellectual development of the working class, as it necessarily had to ensue from united action and discussion,” he succeeded as the movement developed in gaining support for demands of an increasingly Socialist character. Thus by 1868, despite a dwindling Proudhonist opposition, the International, which began without any commitment to public ownership, had come out officially for collective ownership of the mines, railways, arable land, forests and means of communication.

The Paris Commune in the spring of 1871, memorably vindicated by Marx on behalf of the General Council in The Civil War in France, raised very sharply the question of the most effective forms of political action to secure working class political power, which the growth of working class suffrage, as well as the “abstentionist” campaign being run by the Bakuninists in the International, had also helped to make topical. After a discussion in which both Marx and Engels participated, the London Conference adopted its famous Resolution IX, quoted at the beginning of this essay, with which for the first time in its history the International officially came out in favour of the “constitution of the working class into a political party”. This objective was incorporated into the Rules of the International at its Hague Congress a year later. What is meant here however by this much quoted but little analysed formulation? In his very stimulating and well-documented but often contentious study of the London Conference, Dr. Miklos Molnar of Geneva, interprets this resolution, along with those dealing with dues and statistics, as preparing the ground for the International to “become a sort of centralised international party”. Whilst up till then Marx had seen it as a “network of affiliated societies”, Molnar argues that he later conceived and at the London Conference openly came out with “the idea of transforming all these societies and heterogeneous groupings into an international party”.

Molnar is unable to quote any statements from Marx or Engels to support his interpretation of the London Conference resolution and he ignores some very solid evidence indicating that they intended something quite different by it. Thus in 1893 Engels was to welcome the formation of the Independent Labour Party in Britain, saying that “this new party was the very party which the old members of the International desired to see formed” when they passed their resolution at
the 1871 Conference "in favour of an independent political party". Further, in the leaflet, *The Manchester Foreign Section to all Sections and Members of the British Federation*, that Engels drafted in December 1872, he wrote that the resolution "merely demands the formation, in every country, of a distinct working class party, opposed to all middle class parties". That is to say, he continues, "it calls here in England upon the working class to refuse any longer to serve as the fag-end of the 'great Liberal party', and to form an independent party of their own, as they did in the glorious times of the great Chartist movement". Thus we are back to the model of the mass Chartist movement—"the first working men's party of modern times"—which, as explained above, was what the authors of the *Communist Manifesto* had in mind when they spoke there of the "organization of the proletarians into a class, and consequently into a political party".

By 1871 Marx and Engels also had another more recent model in mind. This was the German Social Democratic Workers' Party, formed at Eisenach two years earlier. The anti-war stand taken by its leaders Bebel and Liebknecht in the Reichstag the previous year were cited by Marx at the London Conference as an example of the importance of having workers' representatives in national parliaments, as they had been by Engels when he wrote to the Spanish Federal Council of the International on 13 February 1871. In this important letter, written just before the Paris Commune, Engels argues that "experience has shown everywhere that the best way to emancipate the workers from this domination of the old parties is to form in each country a proletarian party with a policy of its own, a policy quite distinct from that of the other parties".

Thus from 1871, Marx and Engels envisaged the International working for the establishment of independent national workers' parties. They had no wish to prescribe one form or another—neither the more "Marxist" type of party like the Eisenachers who had developed "under the influence of (their) theoretical views", nor the less theoretically developed but more broadly based Chartist movement—as *the model for all countries*. Nor were they aiming, as Molnar asserts, at having the International "provided with a common doctrine". The "common theoretical programme" that Marx had foreseen in 1869 being created "by degrees" by the exchange of ideas throughout the International was conceived in fairly broad terms. Two days after the close of the London Conference Marx made a speech at a dinner for the delegates in which he stressed that "the International had not put forth any particular creed. Its task was to organize the forces of labour and link the various working men's movements and combine them". (Ironically enough a full report of this speech is reproduced
Even at the end of August 1872 at the height of the most bitter battle with the Anarchists, to whose theories Marx and Engels personally were irreconcilably opposed, Engels made it clear that they considered that Bakunin and his followers had the right within the International to carry out “propaganda for their programme”.

The conflict between Marx and Bakunin, as Julius Braunthal points out in his Geschichte der Internationale, “was set alight not by theoretical contradictions but on the question of the organization of the International”. His libertarian demagogy notwithstanding, Bakunin sought to place that organization under the unseen and irresponsible tutelage of a hierarchically organized secret society or societies. “If you form this collective and invisible dictatorship, you will triumph, the well-led revolution will triumph. If not, it won’t”, he wrote on 1 April 1870 to his supporter, Albert Richard.

The real issue at stake between Marx and Bakunin was whether the International should be run as a public democratic organization in accordance with rules and policies laid down at its congresses or whether it should allow Bakunin to “paralyse (its) action by secret intrigue” and federations and sections to refuse to accept congress decisions with which they disagreed. Although Marx and Engels at times undoubtedly overestimated the actual ramifications of Bakuninist secret societies (it was sometimes difficult for the old conspirator himself to keep track of them all and to distinguish between reality and the fantastic projects of his scheming brain) and were guilty in the heat of battle of some polemical exaggeration and inadequately substantiated personal attacks (none of which however descended to the level of the anti-Semitic venom that this supposed internationalist injected into his abuse of Marx), Bakunin gave them ample grounds for rallying their forces to secure his defeat and expulsion at the Hague Congress in September 1872.

Marx’s and Engels’ proposals for increased powers for the General Council, adopted at that congress, should not be seen as aiming to implement a version of the Mazzinist proposal for “a sort of central government for the European working classes” of which Marx had secured the rejection at the beginning of the International, nor the thoroughly authoritarian leadership understood by the French Blanquists in their demand for the International to be “the international vanguard of the proletarian revolution” and their criticism of it after the Hague Congress for being too much of a “parliamentary institution”. All that they were proposing was that the right of the General Council to expel sections, voted at the Basle Congress of 1869 with Bakunin’s wholehearted support, should be extended to include
federations, but under conditions which, as Marx emphasised, “subjected the actions of the General Council to a check”.

In the aftermath of the Paris Commune, faced with persecution from the reactionary forces of Europe and disruption from the Bakuninists, Marx and Engels had no alternative but to fight to give the International an effective centralized leadership. Yet, in so doing, they precipitated its end. Their proposals provided Bakunin with a popular “anti-authoritarian” plank for mobilising opposition to the General Council in Switzerland, Italy, Spain and Belgium, with which a substantial portion of the British, who had supported Marx earlier against the Proudhonists and had no Anarchist sympathies, were to associate themselves. Rather than risk a General Council under the control of the immediate future of the Blanquists, with whom they had had to ally themselves to defeat Bakunin, or perhaps later of Bakunists, they persuaded the Hague Congress to transfer its seat to New York. This congress, as Engels was to recognize by the autumn of 1874, had marked effectively the end of the First International. The “proletarian world”, he wrote, had become “too big, too extensive” for such “an alliance of all the proletarian parties in every country” to recur. The next International, he thought, after the influence of Marx’s writings had spread, would be “directly Communist and will openly proclaim our principles”.

Paradoxically a major factor preventing the revival of the First International that Marx and Engels had hoped for in the first period after the Hague Congress was the development of the national workers’ parties of which its new statutes were designed to promote the growth, but with which in practice their development as autonomous organizations tended to clash. Molnar is right when he says of these parties that the International “gave birth to them and died from them”. Dr Roger Morgan, in his very well-documented study of the first and most important of them, has shown in detail how the emergence of the Eisenach Party, replacing as it had to the International’s German language group led by J. P. Becker from Geneva, led to a dropping off of the direct activities of the International in Germany through the Eisenachers’ preoccupation with their own national campaigns. Marx and Engels never stuck to a given organizational form if they thought the real movement had outgrown it and it had become a “fetter” on its further development. Although their stand in 1871–72 did not save the First International, it did help to provide political and organizational principles for the new parties that were to emerge and in most cases take on a more or less Marxist character. It also helped to ensure that the Second International, finally formed with Engels’ enthusiastic support in 1889, although not “directly Communist”, was very strongly influenced by Marxism. Commenting on the unanimous
decision of its Second Congress in 1891 to exclude the representatives of the Anarchist groups. Engels wrote: "With this the old International came to an end, with this the new one begins again. It is purely and simply the ratification, nineteen years later, of the Hague Congress resolutions".¹⁶³

V

When in 1863 Lassalle founded the General German Workers' Union (ADAV) he performed, in Marx's view, an "immortal service" by reawakening the independent workers' movement after fifteen years of slumber.¹⁶⁶ Yet, although recognizing what was positive in such an independent workers' organization as the ADAV and for a short time in 1864-65 contributing to its journal, he and Engels generally described it as a "workers' sect"¹⁶⁷ rather than a workers' party. They saw the Lassallean attempt to prescribe to the workers the course to be followed "according to a certain dogmatic recipe",¹⁶⁸ its inadequate agitation (at least before 1868) for full political freedom, its leadership cult and the "strict organization",¹⁶⁹ which the ADAV tried to carry even into the trade unions that they set up,¹⁷⁰ as expressions of its sectarian character. Opposing all this, Marx wrote in 1868 to ADAV President Schweitzer that especially in Germany, "where the worker is bureaucratically disciplined from childhood up and believes in authority and the bodies placed over him, it is above all important to teach him to act independently".¹⁷¹

From 1865 Marx concentrated on the formation of sections of the International in Germany to which individual members were recruited. He saw these as preparing the ground for a national workers' party, the creation of which was being facilitated by Bismarck's surge forward to German unification.¹⁷² An important ideological contribution to this was made by the publication exactly a century ago of the first volume of *Capital*, with which Marx hoped "to raise the Party as high as possible"¹⁷³ and which the next year was greeted at the national congresses the two major German workers' organizations—the ADAV¹⁷⁴ and the Association of German Workers' Organizations, led by Bebel and Liebknecht.¹⁷⁵ At a congress at Eisenach in 1869, Bebel's Association joined with opposition elements in the ADAV to form the German Social Democratic Workers' Party on the basis of a programme that showed the influence of Marxism, although its demand for a "free people's state" and certain Lassallean formulations did not meet with the approval of Marx and Engels.¹⁷⁶ Whilst in some respects not as directly Socialist as the ADAV, the new party had over it the great advantage, in Marx's and Engels' eyes, of being unambiguously opposed to Bismarck's nationalism and the Prussian military state and of being organized along thoroughly demo-
cratic lines. In it, Marx and Engels came to recognize a genuine proletarian party\textsuperscript{176} and, for the first time since the dissolution of the Communist League in 1852, to apply the expression “our party” to an organized political party of the day.\textsuperscript{177}

When in 1875 a unity congress was arranged at Gotha between the two German workers’ organizations and a draft programme for the new party was issued, Marx and Engels wrote their famous criticisms of its theoretical insufficiencies\textsuperscript{178} for private consideration by leaders of the Eisenachers. “Every step of real movement is more important than a dozen programmes”, wrote Marx. “If, therefore, it was not possible . . . to go beyond the Eisenach programme, one should simply have concluded an agreement for action against the common enemy”.\textsuperscript{179} Despite these misgivings Marx and Engels associated themselves with the new united party and before very long had come to refer to it too as “our party”\textsuperscript{177} and at the end of his life Engels was praising the fusion for the “immense increase in strength” that it had brought about.\textsuperscript{181}

Whilst rejoicing at the impressive growth of the new party, Marx and Engels always took up the cudgels when they saw signs of “a vulgarization (Verluderung) of Party and theory”\textsuperscript{182} in its ranks. Thus in September 1879 they sent a strongly worded circular to Party leaders criticizing their conciliatory attitude towards certain “representatives of the petty bourgeoisie”\textsuperscript{183} who were attempting to “combat the proletarian character of the Party”\textsuperscript{184} and thereby acting as “an adulterating element”\textsuperscript{185} within it. They found it “incomprehensible” that the Party could “tolerate . . . in its midst any longer”\textsuperscript{186} people who were saying that the workers were too uneducated to emancipate themselves.\textsuperscript{187} In 1882 Engels wrote to Bebel that he had no illusions that it would “one day come to a dispute with the bourgeois-inclined elements in the Party and to a separation between the right and left wings”,\textsuperscript{188} preferably after the Anti-Socialist Law that had been introduced in 1878 had been repealed.\textsuperscript{189}

In the last years of his life Engels approved in its broad essentials the line followed by the Party and the new programme that it adopted, after he had criticized its first draft, at the Erfurt Congress of 1891.\textsuperscript{190} He expressed his pride in “our” electoral successes which in 1893 he saw approaching the two-million mark and over-optimistically predicted an electoral majority and a Socialist government in power between 1900 and 1910.\textsuperscript{191} In 1895, a few months before his death, he worked out in his introduction to The Class Struggles in France 1848–1850 by Marx the theoretical justification of the “entirely new method of proletarian struggle” that had been opened up by the “successful utilisation of universal suffrage”,\textsuperscript{192} relegating to the past “the time of surprise attacks, of revolutions carried through by small conscious minorities
However, he stressed to Paul Lafargue that the tactics outlined there could not be followed in their entirety in France, Belgium, Italy and Austria and that "in Germany they may become inapplicable tomorrow".

Engels considered the designation Social Democratic "inappropriate for a party whose economic programme is not merely generally Socialist but directly Communist and whose ultimate political objective is the abolition of the whole state and thus also of democracy". Professor Harold Laski, in his introduction to the Labour Party's centenary edition of the Communist Manifesto, was unable to recognize that Marx and Engels developed their concept of the party further after 1848. "The idea of a separate communist party dates from the Russian Revolution", he asserts; "it had no place in the thought of either Marx or of Engels", who, for instance, he argues, "never sought to found a separate German Communist Party". He does not see that for them "German Communism" which, as Engels wrote to Sorge, in 1864 "did not yet exist as a workers' party" gradually came to do so after 1869 in the shape of the Socialist parties led by Bebel and Liebknecht.

Nor do the views of Marx and Engels on the development of a Marxist party in France in the same period lend any support to Laski's sweeping assertion that "they will always support working-class parties, even when these are not communist, without forming a separate party of their own", regardless of the fact that "such a party may have an inadequate programme". In fact, in 1882, Engels gave his support to Guesde and the left-wing minority when they walked out of the St. Etienne Congress of the French Workers' Party, which then split into a Guesdist and a "possibilist" party. He described this separation of "incompatible elements" as "inevitable" and "good". Writing to Bernstein, he reported that the "possibilist" right wing had "replaced the Communist preamble" of the 1880 party programme drafted by Marx "by the Rules of the International of 1866", which, he said, "had to be framed so broadly because the French Proudhonists were so backward, and still it would not have been right to exclude them". If, like the possibilists, you created "a party without a programme, which everyone can join, then it isn't a party any more", he argued. "To be for a moment in a minority with a correct programme—quoad organization—is still better than to have a big but thereby almost nominal semblance of a following".

VI

The idea of a broad labour party, favoured by Marx and Engels in the case of Britain and the United States of America and developed
must fully by the latter after his friend’s death, when in the 1880s and 
'90s a spontaneous labour movement sprang into life in both countries, 
would seem to be exactly what they were opposing in Germany and 
France. Thus, writing to Florence Kelley Wischnewetsky at the end of 
1886, Engels says that in the forthcoming American elections “a 
million or two of working men’s votes . . . for a bona fide working 
men’s party is worth infinitely more at present than a hundred thousand 
votes for a doctrinally perfect programme”.205 Whilst he had no 
illusions about the theoretical backwardness of the Knights of Labour 
and of Henry George whose “banner” this party had set up,206 he did 
not think the time had arrived to make a full criticism of either of 
them. “Anything that might delay or prevent that national consolida­
tion of the working men’s party—no matter on what platform—I 
should consider a great mistake,” he explained.207 This should take 
place through “the unification of the various independent bodies into 
one national labour army”,208 he wrote in his preface to the American 
edition of 1887 of his *Condition of the Working Class in England in 
1844*. It should have “the conquest of the Capitol and the White House 
for its goal”.209

In a series of articles in the “Labour Standard” in 1881 Engels had 
urged the British labour movement to form its own “working men’s 
political party”210 and send its own representatives to parliament.211 
With a brilliant anticipation of the form of organization to be adopted 
two decades later by the Labour Party,212 he wrote: “At the side of, 
or above, the Unions of special trades there must spring up a general 
Union, a political organization of the working class as a whole.”213 
When, out of the militant upsurge of 1888-89 and the first successes 
of independent labour candidates in 1892, the Independent Labour 
Party was formed in 1893, Engels publicly “urged all Socialists to join 
it, believing that, if wisely led, it would eventually absorb every other 
Socialist organization”.214 Although there were “all sorts of funny 
people” among the I.L.P. leaders, he wrote to Sorge at this time, “the 
masses are behind them and will either teach them manners or throw 
them overboard”.215 The new party’s development in the next two 
years, however, did not live up to his expectations and by the begin­
nning of 1895 he saw among the British workers “nothing but sects and 
no party”.216 Engels was clearly judging the new party not by the 
criterion of its adherence to the theory of Marxism but by the extent 
to which it was “a distinct workers’ party” promoting and reflecting 
the masses’ “own movement—no matter in what form so long as it is 
only their own movement”.217

Such very disparate weight given to the importance of a correct 
thoretical understanding, to the character of the party programme and 
the breadth of its appeal as those given by Engels (and Marx) in
relation to Germany and France, on the one hand, and to Britain and America, on the other, certainly indicate two different conceptions of the proletarian party. The differences are not however absolute and do not represent some inexplicable contradiction in the thought of the founders of scientific socialism. On the contrary, they will be seen as logically complementary if we examine their application, in each case, on the basis of Engels' explanation, in the letter to Mrs. Kelley Wischnewetsky quoted above, that "our theory is not a dogma but the exposition of a process of evolution, and that process involves successive phases". Britain and the U.S.A. were at this time both countries with substantial industrial working classes that had developed important and often militant industrial organizations, but where those who had understood anything of Socialism were a tiny handful. Here then was an analogy, as Engels pointed out to Sorge, with the part "played by the Communist League among the workers' associations before 1848" in Germany. And here it was therefore perfectly consistent for him to recommend that American Marxists should "act in the same way as the European Socialists have acted at a time when they were but a small minority of the working class", at the time that the Communist Manifesto indicated that the Communists did "not form a separate party opposed to other working class parties". Since 1848, however, the position on the continent had advanced considerably. Germany in 1869 and to a lesser extent France in 1880 had reached the stage of having parties developing roots among the working class on the basis of more or less developed Socialist programmes, and any attempt to fuse with other organizations or to win more votes through "adulterating" or scrapping such programmes seemed to Marx and Engels to represent a "decidedly retrograde step". But for Britain and America, where the workers had been bound politically to bourgeois parties, any move towards a broad united party of their own on however backward a theoretical basis was an advance, the "next great step to be accomplished".

It was the self-imposed isolation of the main organized bodies of Marxists in the two countries that led Engels to criticize them for being and acting only like sects which "contrived to reduce the Marxist theory of development into a rigid dogma". It was fundamentally his objection to such "Anglo-Saxon sectarianism" rather than pique at Hyndman's "tactless" behaviour, as Cole and Postgate, and after them Carew Hunt blandly assert, that was responsible for Engels dissociating himself from the Social Democratic Federation in Britain as from the Socialist Labour Party in the United States. However, he thought that these organizations, having "accepted our theoretical programme and so acquired a basis" would have a rôle to play if they worked among the "still quite plastic mass" of workers as "a core
of people who understand the movement and its aims and will therefore THEMSELVES take over the leadership at a later stage. Experience had shown that "it is possible to work along with the general movement of the working class at every one of its stages without giving up or hiding our own distinct position or even organization". The Marxists would then have a big contribution to make to the emergence of the "ultimate platform" of the labour movement in their countries which "must and will be essentially the same as that now adopted by the whole militant working class of Europe". At such a stage, Engels doubtless foresaw the coming into being of a "new party" such as more than four decades previously he had predicted would arise from "the union of Socialism with Chartism, the reproduction of French Communism in an English manner" by the fusion of the "theoretically more backward, less developed" but "genuinely proletarian" Chartists with the "more far-seeing" Socialists to make the working class "the true intellectual leader" of their country.

VII

Far from "discarding the notion of party . . . to return to the notion of class", as Sorel asserts, Marx and Engels saw the party as a *moment* in the development of the proletariat without which "it cannot act as a class". For the working class "to be strong enough to win on the decisive day", Engels wrote to Trier in 1889, it must "form a separate party distinct from all others and opposed to them, a conscious class party", adding with some oversimplification that this was what "Marx and I have been arguing ever since 1847". In 1865, in "The Prussian Military Question and the German Workers' Party", which he discussed with Marx before publication, Engels defines the workers' party, with which he is not in the pamphlet prepared to identify the only existing German workers' organization of the time, the Lassallean ADAV, as "that part of the working class that has attained consciousness of the separate interests of the class". When they sometimes speak loosely of the proletarian party as though it were identical with the class as a whole, it would seem clear from the contexts that they are referring synecdochically to the class when what they mean in fact is its "politically active portion", which more and more of the class will come to support as it "matures for its self-emancipation".

Theoretical consciousness and the *Selbsttätigkeit* (spontaneous self-activity) of the working class are present, as the key elements in their conception of the proletarian party, in all periods of Marx's and Engels' thought and activity from 1844 on, combining in different proportions in different conditions. They always represent comple-
mentary factors in the Marxian conception of the evolution of the proletariat to full maturity and Selbstbewusstsein (consciousness), rather than expressing a "dualism" in Marx's thought as Maximilien Rubel, of Paris, argues. Rubel tries to fit Marx's conception of the party into the Procrustean bed of the highly disputable theory that there is in his work a "fundamental ambiguity" between his materialist sociology and a utopian ethic that he inherited and that serves as his "postulate" for social revolution. With the aid of quotations collected totally a-historically from a wide range of Marx's and Engels' writings between 1841 and 1895 he seeks to distinguish "a double conception of the proletarian party" in their work, differentiating between "the sociological concept of the workers' party, on the one hand, and the ethical concept of the Communist party, on the other. Karl Marx, asserts Rubel, "distinguishes formally between the workers' party and the body (ensemble) of Communists whose task is of a theoretical and educative order; the Communists are thus in no wise called to properly political functions." Being "a form of non-institutionalized representation which represents the proletarian movement, in the 'historical' sense of the term", the latter "cannot identify themselves with a real organization subject to the constraints of political alienation" and "obeying formally established rules and statutes". The class movement of the proletariat, says Rubel, cannot be identified with the political agitation of parties. "On the contrary", he goes on, "it is represented by the trade unions if these understand their revolutionary rôle and fulfil it faithfully". (This last assertion, endeavouring to present Marx and Engels as Syndicalists, completely ignores inter alia Marx's and Engels' rejection before the Eisenach Congress of just such an argument by Johann Philip Becker. "Old Becker must have gone right off his rocker", Engels wrote to Marx then. "How can he decree that the trades union has to be the true workers' association and the basis for all organization.")

The Manifesto of the Communist Party, from which Rubel quotes, as well as the whole history of its authors' party work on which we have drawn, shows absolutely clearly and explicitly that they saw the Communists using their theoretical foresight, which for Rubel is some sort of transcendental ethical quality far removed from the corrupting political struggle, precisely to act politically to "push forward" and give leadership in the political struggles of their time. Moreover the Manifesto was issued as the programme of the Communist League, a political organization "obeying formally established rules and statutes".

Only in the most exceptional and temporary periods did the Communists operate outside a "real organization", although—as in the case of the First International—that organization did not always
need to be a Communist Party. The latter differed from “other working class parties” in that it had a Communist programme and was guided by Communist theory. However, believing that the workers “from out of their own class feeling” would “work their way up” to an acceptance of Marxist theory with the help of those “whose minds are theoretically clear” to shorten the process considerably, Marx and Engels thought that sooner or later many of these other parties would either come to adopt Communist programmes or be absorbed by others that had. In this belief they were strengthened at the end of their lives by the example of German Social Democracy that was developing into the type of essentially Communist mass party towards which they believed that other workers’ parties, from their different starting points and in their own national forms, would ultimately advance. They saw such a fully developed proletarian party representing the fusion of Socialist theory not just with a tiny handful of advanced workers as in the Communist League but with large and growing sections of the working class.

Marx and Engels saw the fullest possible internal democracy as an essential feature of a proletarian party. Disturbed by expulsions from the Danish Socialist Party of leading left-wing opponents of its leadership, Engels wrote to Trier in the letter quoted above: “The workers’ movement is based on the sharpest criticism of existing society; criticism is its vital element; how then can it itself avoid criticism, try to forbid controversies? Is it possible for us to demand from others freedom of speech for ourselves only in order to eliminate it afresh in our own ranks?” When in 1890 the German Party leadership reacted in a high-handed way to the opposition of the so-called Jungen (with whom Engels disagreed politically) expressed through four Social Democratic papers that they controlled, he wrote to Sorge: “The Party is so big that absolute freedom of debate inside it is a necessity. . . . The greatest party in the land cannot exist without all shades of opinion in it making themselves fully felt.” For Engels such internal democracy, diversity and debate did not contradict but was demanded by German Social Democracy’s existence “as the strongest, best disciplined and most rapidly growing Socialist Party”, just as adversely he and Marx had at a certain stage in the history of the First International seen a stronger General Council with disciplinary powers to use in exceptional cases as a condition for its democratic functioning.

Marx’s famous principle that “the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves”, on which he and Engels insisted again and again, is complemented, not contradicted, by their concept of the party. “The German Social Democratic Workers’ Party, just because it is a workers’ party necessarily pursues a ‘class policy’, the policy of the working class,” wrote Engels in 1873
in The Housing Question. "Since each political party sets out to establish its rule in the state, so the German Social Democratic Workers' Party is necessarily striving to establish its rule, the rule of the working class, hence 'class domination'".239 The organization by the proletariat of its own party was the "primary condition" of the struggle of the working class and "the dictatorship of the proletariat ... the immediate aim." Marx and Engels never went further than this in discussing the relationship of the proletarian party to their conception of proletarian dictatorship201 which they saw as representing a "political transition period" between capitalism and Communism.202 There is nothing in their work to justify Stalin's attempt to present as Marxist his theory that Socialism demands a one-party system,203 least of all in the form operated by him where a small tyrannical clique substituted itself for the working class in laying some of the foundations of Socialism. On the contrary, Engels' criticism of Blanqui is directed precisely against such a régime. "From Blanqui's conception of every revolution as the coup de main of a small revolutionary minority," he wrote in 1874, "follows of itself the necessity of a dictatorship after it succeeds: the dictatorship, of course, not of the whole revolutionary class, the proletariat, but of the small number of those who carried out the coup and who are themselves already in advance organized under the dictatorship of one or a few individuals".204 Certainly the Paris Commune, which Marx described as "the conquest of the political power of the working classes"265 and Engels as "the dictatorship of the proletariat"266 (by which he meant the same thing), was no one-party state267 and was based on the election of all officials by universal suffrage268 and measures to "safeguard itself against its own deputies and officials, by declaring them all, without exception, subject to recall at any moment".209

The late Mr Carew Hunt, in his book Marxism Past and Present, is on peculiarly weak ground when he bases his restatement of the well-worn argument that the one-party system was "written into Marx's doctrine of dictatorship" on the assertion that "it is inconceivable that Marx, who would go to any lengths to crush a Socialist opponent," would have permitted adversaries "to organize themselves politically to defeat the objects for which the revolution had been carried out".270 The main example that Carew Hunt obviously has in mind is that of Bakunin and his supporters, of whose appearance in the First International E. H. Carr writes: "The wooden horse had entered the Trojan citadel".271 In a letter to Bolte in 1873 Marx wrote: "In open opposition to the International these people do no harm but are useful, but as hostile elements inside it they ruin the movement in all countries where they have got a foothold".272 He and Engels rejected the Bakuninists' argument that the International, forced to meet the needs of the
day-to-day struggle against capitalism, could be organized to accord as closely as possible with a future libertarian society. Whilst Marx and Engels would certainly have taken exceptional authoritarian measures against reactionary opponents in a civil war or a “pro-slavery rebellion” there are no grounds for arguing that they would have favoured the suppression of political opposition and dissent as a normal feature of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The rôle of the proletarian party is circumscribed by the very conception of dialectics and historical development put forward by Marx and Engels. Born at a certain moment in the life of the working class, evolving in step with the different stages in the development of that class in different countries and periods and in its turn reacting on and speeding up this development, its success in helping to establish working class power would lay the basis for its own disappearance. Working class power, by raising the consciousness of the widest sections of the population by a big educational expansion, by establishing “really democratic institutions” which would see “the people acting for itself by itself”, could be assumed gradually to close the gap between a growing “educated and trained core” of hundreds of thousands in the party and the rest of the class, removing the raison d’être of the former conceived as a separate echelon. Finally, though Marx had no illusions that this would take place quickly, the economic measures taken by the proletariat in power would end its rule by abolishing its existence as a class and, with it, the existence of the state “in the present political sense”. In the “association which will exclude classes and their antagonism” to which Marx believed the transitional working class dictatorship would give way, the continued existence of a proletarian party would clearly be an anachronism.

NOTES

1. Resolution relative to the General Rules (adopted at the Hague Congress of the International Working Men’s Association, September 1872, resuming Resolution IX of the London Conference of the International in September 1871 drafted by Marx and Engels), in The International Herald (London), No. 37, 14 December 1872. This translation from the French original is used here in preference to that appearing in K. Marx and F. Engels, Selected Works, hereafter noted as S.W. (Moscow, 1950), I, p. 325, from which it differs possibly significantly, because it is specifically referred to by Engels to clear up a misinterpretation of the meaning of the resolution. (F. Engels, The Manchester Foreign Section To all Sections and Members of the British Federation, in K. Marx and F. Engels, On Britain, Moscow, 1962, p. 500). It is also used by Marx as the English text of the resolution in a letter sent to H. Jung at the end of July 1872 with the phrase “constituting . . . propertied classes” and the words “the abolition of classes” underlined. (K. Marx/F. Engels, Werke, hereafter noted as Werke, Berlin, 1966, 33, p. 507).
2. cf. M. I. Mikhailov, *Voznikovenie Marksizma. Bor'ba Marksa i Engelsa za Sozdanie Revoliutsionnoy Proletarskoy Partii* (Moscow, 1956), p. 15, where, without offering any evidence, the author states that Marx and Engels proceeded from such a "plan".


4. Only from 1847-1852 were Marx and Engels members of a party organization of a kind—the League of Communists—though from 1864 (and effectively from 1870 in the case of Engels) till 1872 they played a leading part in the International Working Men's Association (the First International).


18. The original German text uses the word "besonders", meaning "special", but the English edition of 1888, revised by F. Engels, prefers "sectarian".

19. *Manifesto*, p. 44.


25. Manifesto, p. 44.
26. See *ibid.*, p. 60, where reference is also made to the Agrarian Reformers in America. The latter was however more of a farmers’ agitation than a workers’ party. (See D. Ryazanoff, Ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 242-245).
28. Manifesto, p. 60.
This quotation and the passage in which it is to be found make rather a mockery of Mr. Robert Conquest’s unsubstantiated assertion (*Marxism Today*, Amperasand Books, London, 1964, p. 42) that “it is strictly contrary to (Marx’s) doctrines . . . to believe that a party can represent both the proletariat and another class.”
30. K. Marx/F. Engels, *Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League* (March 1850), hereafter noted as *March Address*, S.W., I, p. 98.
ung einer schlechten Sache", in Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung hereafter Beiträge, (Berlin, 1963), V., 2, pp. 290-303.

38. The full text of this deposition, introduced by the late Dr. W. Blumenberg, is printed in International Review of Social History, (Amsterdam, 1964), IX, 1, pp. 81-122. See esp. pp. 88-9, 96.

39. Röser did not join the Communist League till the spring of 1849 (Ibid., p. 90). His evidence on its alleged dissolution in 1848 is therefore of necessity presented second-hand. (Ibid., pp. 88-9, 96.)


41. Nicolaevsky was wrong to assert that the March Address of 1850 "criticised . . . in particular the decision to dissolve the League" (B. Nicolaevsky and O. Maenchen-Hellen, Karl Marx: Man and Fighter, London, 1936, p. 206) since no mention is made there of such a dissolution!

42. F. Engels, Marx and the N.Rh.Z., op. cit., p. 299.
43. Beiträge, op. cit., p. 303.

45. A positive reference is made to this action of the London Central Committee in the March Address, op. cit., p. 99, which places Moll's visit "in the winter of 1848-49" as against Röser's setting it "in the spring of 1849" (I.R.S.H., op. cit., p. 89).


47. E. P. Kandel, Beiträge, op. cit., p. 299.


50. V. I. Lenin, Two Tactics of Social Democracy, in his Selected Works (Moscow, 1936), III, pp. 131-2.


54. Ibid., pp. 98-108.

55. Ibid., p. 98.

56. Ibid., p. 99.

57. Ibid., p. 102. cf. Address of Central Committee to the League, June 1850, Werke (Berlin, 1960), 7, pp. 308-9: "The workers' party can possibly very well use other parties and fractions of parties for its ends, but it should not subordinate itself to any other party."

58. Ibid., p. 103.

60. March Address, op. cit., p. 105.
63. E. Bernstein, Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokraten (Stuttgart, 1899), p. 29.
67. Ibid., p. 103.
68. Ibid., p. 104.
70. March Address, op. cit., p. 108.
73. F. Engels to K. Marx, 12 February 1851, ibid., p. 186.
74. K. Marx to F. Engels, 11 February 1851, ibid., p. 185.
75. F. Engels to K. Marx, 13 February 1851, ibid., p. 189.
76. Ibid., p. 190.
78. Wolfe, op. cit., p. 196.
82. K. Marx to F. Freiligrath, 29 February 1860, Sel. Cor. (Moscow), p. 146. Italics in original.
83. Ibid., p. 147.
86. K. Marx to F. Engels, 10 March 1853, Werke, 28, p. 224.
87. F. Engels to J. Weydemeyer, 12 April 1853, ibid., p. 576. (This part of the letter is not included in L.A.)
88. See, e.g. ibid., p. 581, where Engels comments acidly on those who thought they need not bother to “swot” as it was the job of “der père Marx” to know everything! Also, W. Liebknecht’s account (see his Karl Marx: Biographical Memoirs, Chicago, 1901, p. 85) of Marx “driving” his “party” every day into the Reading Room of the British Museum.
THE SOCIALIST REGISTER, 1967

91. Sel. Cor. (Moscow), p. 146.
92. Werke (Berlin, 1964), 30, p. 495. (This part of the letter is not included in the English Sel. Cor.)
93. Sel. Cor. (Moscow), p. 147.
94. See, e.g. Manifesto, op. cit., p. 42.
100. Half a century later such a conception was dubbed as "substitutism" by Trotsky who imputed it to Lenin and attacked him in the name of Marxism for allegedly favouring the party substituting itself for the working class which, he argued, would lead to a single "dictator" substituting himself for the party. (See I. Deutscher, The Prophet Armed (London, 1954, pp. 90-91.)
102. For an unwarranted generalisation from this historically determined special case, see R. Garaudy, Humanisme Marxiste (Paris, 1957), p. 299. To the question (asked in relation to a situation such as that which arose in Hungary in 1956): "Where then is the working class?" Garaudy, who quotes Marx's statement, writes: "A Marxist can only reply: it is wherever a man or a group of men is conscious of the historical mission of the working class and fights to accomplish it." Garaudy's more recent writings would suggest that he is today more conscious of the dangers implicit in such a paternalistic approach than he was ten years ago when he wrote these lines.
104. F. Engels to F. A. Sorge, 12 (and 17) September 1874, ibid., p. 330.
105. Socialism in Germany, op. cit., p. 247.
108. Engels was only able to come on to the General Council of the International when he moved from Manchester to London in the autumn of 1870. (See G. Mayer, Friedrich Engels: a Biography, London, 1936, p. 197.)
111. See W. Schmidt, Zum Verhältnis zwischen dem Bund der Kommunisten und der I. Internationale, in Beiträge, 1964, VI, S.

113. S.W., I, p. 348.

114. Dr. Ernst Engelberg, in his Johann Philipp Becker in der I. Internationale (Berlin, 1964), p. 30, is however going much too far when he asserts that by this formulation of 1864 Marx meant "the disciplined, centralised party" with its "scientific theory".


121. K. Marx to L. Kugelmann, 9 October 1866, Sel Cor. (London), p. 214.

122. K. Marx to F. Engels, 4 November 1864, ibid., p. 163.


126. In 1867 Bismarck had introduced universal manhood suffrage into the North German Confederation and extended it to the new German Reich in 1871. Urban workers in Britain had been given the vote under the Second Reform Bill of 1867.

127. See La Première Internationale, op. cit., II, pp. 191 ff. A fuller report of Engels' speech, which alone refers specifically to the need for the workers to form an independent party, is given in Werke (Berlin, 1962), 17, p. 416.

128. The International Herald, No. 37, 14 December 1872. (See, above, Note 1.)

was thinking in terms of making the I.W.M.A. into an international workers' party with the General Council as its executive committee in the absence of national parties that could oppose this. (Molnar, p. 134, n.18, dissociates himself from this extreme view.) In recent years however Soviet colleagues have come more correctly to see the London Conference decisions as aiming at "the creation in each country of an independent proletarian party." (See B. E. Kunina, "Iz Istoriit deiatel'nosti Marks'a v General'nom Sovete I. Internatsionala, 1871-72," in L. I. Gol'man, Ed., Iz Istoriit Marksizma i Mezhdunarodnogo rabochego Dvizheniya (Moscow, 1963), p. 349; I. A. Bakh, Ed., Pervyi Internatsional (Moscow, 1965), II, p. 137.


131. M. Molnar, op. cit., p. 35.

132. The Workman's Times, 25 March 1893. The report carried there of this important speech made by Engels on 18 March 1893 at a London meeting commemorating the Paris Commune does not appear in the Werke, or in the Russian Sochineniya whose second edition they follow, whose tables of dates from Engels' life do not make any reference to it. (See Werke, 22, p. 673.) It is, however, quoted by S. Bünger, Friedrich Engels und die britische Sozialistische Bewegung von 1881-1895 (Berlin, 1962), p. 207. This latter work draws on a wide range of original sources and gives an extremely valuable factual and analytical treatment of this period. It is to be hoped that with the growth of studies in labour history in this country it will soon find an English translator and publisher.


135. Ibid., p. 500.


137. S.W., I, p. 41.


139. Sel. Cor. (Moscow), p. 315.

140. Ibid., pp. 314-5.

141. F. Engels to A. Bebel, 14 November 1879, Werke (Berlin, 1966), 34, p. 421. (The translation in Sel. Cor., Moscow, p. 398, is poor.)

142. "The Association does not dictate the form of political movements," said Marx two months before the London Conference. "In each part of the world some special aspect of the problem presents itself, and the workmen there address themselves to its consideration in their own way." (The World, 18 July 1871, op. cit., p. 130.)

143. Molnar, op. cit., p. 137.


MARX AND ENGELS AND THE CONCEPT OF THE PARTY

148a. See, e.g. Circulaire a toutes les federations de l'Association Internationale des Travailleurs (from the Sonvillier Congress, 1871), in Archives Bakounine, op. cit., I, 2, esp. p. 405, which rejects "any leadership endowed with authority (toute autorité directrice) even if it has been elected and consented to by the workers."
150. See, e.g. F. Mehring, op. cit., pp. 429, 491–2.
151. See, e.g. Archives Bakounine, op. cit., I, 2, pp. 124–6, where Bakunin refers to the Jews as "an exploiting sect, a bloodsucking people, a unique devouring parasite, tightly and intimately organised . . . cutting across all the differences of political opinion", and Marx and the Rothschilds are said to hold each other in high esteem!
159. Ibid., p. 330.
160. Molnar, op. cit., p. 188.
163. S.W., II, p. 323.
163a. See F. Engels, The Sonvillier Congress and the International, Werke (Berlin, 1962), 17, pp. 477–8. Also D. Lekovic, "Revolucionarna delatnost Prve internacionalne kao faktor razvitka marksizma", Prilozi za istoriju socijalizma, II. (Belgrade, 1964), esp. pp. 37–50, which deals with some very important problems of Marx's and Engels' ideas on organization in this period, such as the relationship between centralism and autonomy,


166. K. Marx to J. B. Schweitzer, 13 October 1868 (Draft), Sel. Cor. (London), p. 250.

167. See, e.g. F. Engels to L. Kugelmann, 10 July 1869, Werke (Berlin, 1965), 32, p. 621.


170. F. Engels to K. Marx, 30 September 1868, ibid., p. 170.

171. K. Marx to J. B. Schweitzer, 13 October 1868, ibid., p. 570.


175. See, e.g. K. Marx, Notes on Bakunin's "Statism and Anarchy", Werke, 18, p. 636.

176. See F. Engels, Prefatory Notes (1874) to his Peasant War in Germany, S.W., I, pp. 590-591.

177. See, e.g. F. Engels to A. Bebel, 18-28 March 1875, Sel. Cor. (London), pp. 332, 333.


179. Ibid., pp. 15-16. Italics in original.


184. Ibid., p. 370.

185. Ibid., p. 376.

186. Ibid., p. 376.

187. Ibid., p. 377.

188. F. Engels to A. Bebel, 21 June 1882, in F. Engels, Briefe an Bebel (Berlin, 1958), p. 64.


190. F. Engels to F. A. Sorge, 24 October 1891, L.A., pp. 237-8. Carlo Schmid, in his article “Ferdinand Lassalle und die Politisierung der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung”, in Archiv für Sozialgeschichte, (Hanover, 1963), III, p. 6, notes that it was especially at the Erfurt Congress that
the party “officially dissociated itself ideologically from the opinions of Lassalle.”


192. *S.W.,* I, p. 120.


199. Laski, *op. cit.*, p. 57. My emphasis.


202. Actually the possibilist preamble, of which presumably at that stage Engels had only seen limited reports, went much further than the 1866 Rules to the International. (See its text in *Engels-Lafargue Correspondence*, I, p. 108.)


212. See, e.g. Š. Bünker, *op. cit.*, p. 29.


225. In respect of the S.D.F., see, e.g. *Interview with “Daily Chronicle”*, op. cit., p. 397; re S.L.P., see, e.g. F. Engels to F. A. Sorge, 10 November 1894, *L.A.*, p. 263.
244. *R. franç. Sociol.*, op. cit., p. 175.
251. S.W., I, p. 44. See, e.g. The Demands of the Communist Party in Germany, in D. Ryazanoff, Ed., Manifesto, pp. 345-7, written by Marx and Engels at the outbreak of the 1848 Revolution as a programme of immediate demands for which the members of the Communist League were to campaign politically.
253. Manifesto, S.W., I, p. 44. My emphasis.
254. F. Engels to F. A. Sorge, 12 May 1894, Briefe und Auszüge, p. 412. The translation of this passage, whose phrasing has considerable significance for an understanding of Marx’s and Engels’ conception of the sources of revolutionary consciousness, is not entirely satisfactory in either On Britain (1953), p. 536, or L.A., p. 263.
256. F. Engels to G. Trier, 18 December 1889, K. Marx/F. Engels, Sochineniya (Moscow, 1965), 37, p. 276. To the best of my knowledge this part of the letter, first published in Russian in 1932, has never been published either in its German original or in English. (At the time of going to press the Werke have only reached Volume 34, carrying the Marx-Engels correspondence with third persons up to the end of 1880.)
260. Ibid., p. 556.
263. J. V. Stalin, Interview with Roy Howard, in The Communist International (London), March—April, 1936, p. 14. “Where several classes do not exist,” argues Stalin, “there cannot be several parties, since (a) party is part of (a) class.” Marx and Engels never took such a crude view of the class basis of parties. Whilst Engels described parties as “the more or less adequate political expression of . . . classes and fractions of classes”
(Introduction to Class Struggles in France, S.W., I, p. 110), he noted that, due to the uneven political development of the working class, "the 'solidarity of the proletariat' is everywhere realized in different party groupings which carry on life and death feuds with one another." (F. Engels to A. Bebel, 20 June 1873, Sel. Cor., London, p. 327.) Moreover, Marx saw exclusively "ideological" factors as the raison d'être of the republican faction of the bourgeoisie", for instance, that in 1848 stood in opposition to the Party of Order representing the monarchist section of that class (Eighteenth Brumaire, S.W., I, p. 234), just as Engels forty years later was to see the anti-Prussian regional particularism of the Catholic areas as the basis for the then rising German Centre Party comprising a mixture of class elements. (F. Engels, What Next?, Werke, 22, p. 8.)

267. Members of the Commune were divided into a Blanquist majority and a mainly Proudhonist minority of members of the International. (See Engels, op. cit., p. 426.) Various political groups, including the middle class Union Républicaine, functioned freely. It is however significant that Marx and Engels after the experience of the Commune stressed more strongly than ever before the need for independent working class parties to give the kind of conscious leadership and direction that had been lacking in Paris. In this connection it should be borne in mind, as Engels was to write to Bernstein on 1 January 1884, that in Marx's Civil War in France "the unconscious tendencies of the Commune were put down to its credit as more or less conscious plans." (Sel. Cor., Moscow, p. 440; Italics in original.)

270. R. N. Carew Hunt, Marxism, op. cit., p. 155.
272. K. Marx to F. Wolf, 12 February 1873, Werke (Berlin, 1966), 33, p. 566. Italics in original. Cf. also Marx's and Engels' Circular Letter, 1879, on the "right" of "the representatives of the petty bourgeoisie" to form their own independent party outside the German Social Democratic Workers' Party. (Sel. Cor., London, p. 376.)

275. Civil War, S.W., I, p. 471.
276. Ibid., p. 473.
278. F. Engels to J. P. Becker, 1 April 1880, Werke (Berlin, 1966), 34 p. 441. (The translation in Sel. Cor., London, p. 381, is inaccurate.)
280. Ibid., p. 634.
281. The Poverty of Philosophy, op. cit., p. 197.