

Karl Marx and Freedom of the Press

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1. Introduction

When Karl Marx started his career as a writer in the early 1840s, Germany had one of the most oppressive systems of censorship in the whole of Europe. Censorship had been transferred from ecclesiastical to political authorities, and even mild criticism of the government had slim chances of being printed. Previously, it had been possible to protest against censorship by inserting dashes or blank spaces instead of the removed passages, but since 1834 that was forbidden.¹ The English writer William Howitt wrote in 1844 that German newspapers were unable to write on “all those great questions which involve the political progress and development of a people.” The reason for this was that “over all the heads of such journals hangs the iron pen of the censor, and fills every writer with terror.”² Censorship and other burdens on the press affected every German writer in the nineteenth century,³ and Marx was certainly no exception.⁴

2. From academic writing to journalism

As a university student in Berlin, Karl Marx was part of the “young Hegelian” movement, which produced radical criticism of religion and increasingly also of the Prussian political system. He was considered a promising young scholar, and Bruno Bauer (1809-1882), one of the leaders of the movement, wanted to recruit him to a university career. However, in 1842 the government withdrew

Bauer's license to teach. In practice, this also put an end to Marx's hopes for a university career. In this situation he was offered a position on the editorial staff of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, a new liberal paper in Cologne. The journal had obtained a license to publish since the Prussian government wanted a counterforce against the Catholic *Kölnische Zeitung* that had been the only daily in Cologne since 1839. The *Rheinische Zeitung* was funded by wealthy liberals, but the people to whom they assigned the task of recruiting editors had connections with young Hegelianism. The editor-in-chief was Adolf Rutenberg, himself a young Hegelian. Marx accepted the offer and arrived at the editorial offices in October 1842. In spite of being only 24 years old, he became the editor-in-chief within a couple of weeks.

Marx was already engaged in issues of press freedom. In January 1842 he wrote a critical comment on the Prussian censorship instructions. He sent it to the daily *Deutsche Jahrbücher* that was edited by the young Hegelian Arnold Ruge (1802-1880).⁵ Ruge replied that since censorship had recently worsened, it "has become impossible" to publish the text in the journal.⁶ Instead he offered to include it in a collection of texts by German philosophers that he planned to publish in Switzerland. Marx accepted the offer,⁷ and the text was indeed published in that collection in Switzerland in February 1843.⁸

Marx's editorship of the *Rheinische Zeitung* was no sinecure. One of his first problems was a threat from the authorities to withdraw the journal's license unless Rutenberg was removed. "Yielding to force," Marx fired his predecessor in order to save the journal.⁹ On a daily basis he had to deal with the capriciousness of the journal's censor, Laurenz Dolleschall, who was famous for having once removed an advertisement for a translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy* with the justification that there should be no comedy concerning divine matters.¹⁰ After two months as an editor Marx wrote to Arnold Ruge that "every day the censorship tears us mercilessly to pieces, so that frequently the newspaper is hardly able

to appear.”¹¹ He also had a conflict with some of the young Hegelians who wanted him to publish their antireligious writings.¹² Instead, he focused the journal more on political issues. This shift in focus led to a tripled circulation,¹³ and it seems to have been appreciated by the journal’s owners, but at the same time it further complicated his relationship with the authorities.

As an editor, Marx strongly protected the anonymity of the journal’s sources and the writers of its unsigned articles. Only a few days after he joined the journal, the *Rheinische Zeitung* published what would today have been called a scoop. The Prussian government had commissioned a proposal for a new piece of divorce legislation, which it treated as a state secret and only circulated among a very small group of people. The *Rheinische Zeitung* got hold of the text and managed to publish it—presumably the censor believed it to be unproblematic since it was a government document. This gave rise to a rather widespread discussion about the proposal, which the government most certainly did not wish. The government required that the journal should disclose its source, but Marx and his colleagues refused to do so.¹⁴

Two months later, the journal published two articles that described the misery and hardships of farmers in the Mosel area. This was an embarrassment to the government. The Oberpräsident of the Rhineland province, the highest representative of the Prussian government in the province, demanded the name of the anonymous author, whom he also required to prove the claims in the articles. Marx refused to reveal the name of the author, and instead performed extensive research to document the claims made in the articles. He started to write a series of five (anonymous) articles that would confirm the information in the original articles. He defended the right of anonymous publication:

Further, my reply appears *anonymously*. In this respect I am guided by the conviction that *anonymity* is an essential feature of the newspaper

press, since it transforms the newspaper from an assemblage of many individual opinions into the organ of *one spirit*. [...] Finally, anonymity ensures greater impartiality and freedom, not only of the author, but also of the public, since the latter sees not *who* is speaking, but *what* he is saying. Free from an empirical view of the author as a person, the public judges him solely by his intellectual personality.¹⁵

Only two of the planned five parts of the series could be published. After the third part was presented to the censor, the journal was prohibited to publish this or the other remaining parts.¹⁶ (However, the third part, or at least most of it, was published in 1844 in a collection of texts about Prussian bureaucracy. It was printed in Hessen, which was not part of Prussia.)

3. Two articles on censorship

The most important sources from this period on Marx's views on freedom of the press are two long articles that he devoted to the subject. One was the above-mentioned article that was published by Arnold Ruge in Switzerland. The other was an article that he published in the *Rheinische Zeitung* before he joined its editorial staff. To make the latter article publishable, he refrained from criticizing the government and instead performed a close critical analysis of various statements that had been made by members of the (powerless and far from democratically elected) Rhineland parliament in a debate about the press legislation. The two articles will be treated together here, since they were written within a short period of time and treated the same topic.

Marx's description of the role of the press was passionate, to say the least:

The free press is the ubiquitous vigilant eye of a people's soul, the embodiment of a people's faith in

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itself, the speaking link that connects the individual with the state and the world, the embodied culture that transforms material struggles into intellectual struggles and idealises their crude material form. It is a people's frank confession to itself, and the redeeming power of confession is well known. It is the spiritual mirror in which a people sees itself, and self-examination is the first condition of wisdom. It is the spirit of the state, which can be delivered into every cottage, less expensive than material gas. It is all-sided, ubiquitous, omniscient. It is the ideal world which always wells up out of the real world and flows back into it with ever greater spiritual riches and renews its soul.¹⁷

One of the major functions of the press was to make it possible for rulers and ruled to meet in a discussion on equal terms:

In the realm of the press, rulers and ruled alike have an opportunity of criticizing their principles and demands, and no longer in a relation of subordination, but on terms of equality as *citizens of the state*; no longer as *individuals*, but as *intellectual forces*, as exponents of reason.¹⁸

One of the participants in the Rhineland parliamentary debates had defended freedom of the press as nothing more or less than a part of the freedom of trade.¹⁹ Marx strongly opposed this line of argument. To defend the freedom of the press in this way was "a defence that kills it before defending it." The freedom of any sphere would have to be based on the essential character of that sphere. The judge could be said to pursue the trade of law and the preacher the trade of religion, but that is not the essential character of these activities, and therefore the freedom of these activities cannot be subsumed under the general freedom of trade. As to the press, he maintained that its primary freedom "consists in not being a trade." There was a

“freedom of trade of printers and booksellers,” but the freedom of the press was something different. It concerned the activities of authors, who do not see their work as mere means but as “ends in themselves.”²⁰

He also pointed out that even in countries without freedom of the press in the usual sense, the government itself enjoys full freedom of the press, and does not wish to get rid of it.²¹ This, in Marx’s view, illustrated an interesting feature of freedom: “No man combats freedom; at most he combats the freedom of others.”²² In this sense, the Prussian government was not against freedom of the press as such:

It is not a question whether freedom of the press ought to exist, for it always exists. The question is whether freedom of the press is a privilege of particular individuals or whether it is a privilege of the human mind.²³

He disparaged censorship as “the *permanent incapacitation* of the human race.”²⁴ Censorship was bad in itself and could not be defended by showing that censors were right and the censored authors wrong on any particular issues:

The censored press remains bad even when it turns out good products, for these products are good only insofar as they represent the free press within the censored press, and insofar as it is not in their character to be products of the censored press. The free press remains good even when it produces bad products, for the latter are deviations from the essential nature of the free press. A eunuch remains a bad human being even when he has a good voice. Nature remains good even when she produces malformations.

The essence of the free press is the characterful, rational, moral essence of freedom. The character of

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the censored press is the characterless monster of unfreedom; it is a civilised monster, a perfumed deformity.²⁵

Even the proponents of censorship did not claim that it was a good in itself.

The censorship itself, however, admits that it is not an end in itself, that it is not something good in and for itself, that its basis therefore is the principle: "The end justifies the means." But an end which requires unjustified means is no justifiable end [...].²⁶

One of the tasks of censors was to determine whether writers on scientific topics had the necessary competence in the topics on which they wished to publish. Marx took this as a starting point for a satirical praise of the censors:

Not the slightest doubt arises as to whether the censor can have the scientific qualification to pass judgment on scientific qualification of every kind. If such a crowd of universal geniuses known to the government are to be found in Prussia—every town has at least one censor—why do not these encyclopaedic minds come forward as writers? If these officials, overpowering through their numbers and more powerful owing to their scientific knowledge and genius, were all at once to rise up and smother by their weight those miserable writers, each of whom can write in only one genre, and even in that without officially attested qualification, an end could be put to the irregularities of the press much better than through the censorship. Why do these brilliant men who, like the Roman geese, could save the Capitol by their cackling remain silent? They are men who stay too much in the

background. [...] For a state that possesses such pillars of a perfect press, is it worth the trouble, is it expedient to make these men the *guardians* of a defective press, to degrade the perfect into a means for dealing with the imperfect?²⁷

Instead of using such men for “a defective censorship,” the state should use them to provide the public with “a perfect press.”²⁸ More seriously, Marx noted that according to its instructions, “the censorship should not prevent serious and modest investigation of truth.”²⁹ He vehemently denied that modesty is a desirable feature of scientific research:

Is it not the first duty of the seeker after truth to aim directly at the truth, without looking to the right or left? Will I not forget to say what I should say, if I am even more obliged not to forget to say it in the prescribed form?

Truth is as little modest as light, and towards whom should it be so? [...]

If modesty is the characteristic feature of the investigation, then it is a sign that truth is feared rather than falsehood.³⁰

He took the opportunity to denounce relativistic views on truth. In his view, “truth is general, it does not belong to me, it belongs to all, it owns me, I do not own it.” Only the form in which truth was expressed, not truth itself, could belong to an individual.³¹ In another article in 1842 he defended the independence of science: “Who is to decide on the limits of scientific research if not scientific research itself?”³²

Marx pointed out the specific legal problems with censorship, as compared to decision-making in a court of law. First of all, the position of a censor and that of a judge in a reasonable legal system were different. An independent judge “belongs neither to me nor to the government,” whereas a censor is part of the government’s

administration. When an author is prosecuted for a published text, he must be accused of "disobeying an existing law." In contrast, the censor does not accuse the author of breaking an existing law, but "condemns my opinion because it is not the opinion of the censor and his superiors." Therefore, censorship is a "hidden, purely negative power, which cannot give itself the form of law, which shuns the light of day, and which is not bound by any general principles."³³ Furthermore, the Prussian censorship instruction explicitly distinguished between criticism of the government whose "tendency" was "well-intentioned" and criticism that was "spiteful or malevolent."³⁴ Marx pointed out that this rule did not refer to the contents of the actual text but to the intentions of its author. "Laws which make their main criterion not *actions as such*, but the *frame of mind* of the doer" were in his view "nothing but *positive sanctions for lawlessness*." They were "laws of terrorism" just like the terror laws under Robespierre.³⁵ In another article, he generalized this to a general condemnation of systems in which a person could lose some legal right "because of his moral character or because of his political or *religious* opinions."³⁶

Censorship was the most conspicuous form of oppression of the press, and the form that authors and newspaper editors had to deal with on a regular basis. It was also the form of oppression that was subject to most criticism and opposition. However, the German and European press was also subject to other forms of oppression, such as laws making criticism of the monarch or the government punishable, large deposits (caution money) required for a license to publish a newspaper, and various other economic burdens such as taxes that made it impossible to publish a paper cheap enough to reach workers and other potential readers with small means.³⁷ Contrary to many other critics of censorship, Marx paid attention to these forms of oppression as well:

The French press is not too free; it is not free enough. It is true that it is not subject to a spiritual

censorship, but it is subject to a material censorship, in the shape of high money sureties. It operates materially precisely because it is taken out of its proper sphere and drawn into the sphere of large trade speculations. Moreover, large trade speculations are a matter for large towns. Hence the French press is concentrated at few points [...].³⁸

4. The prohibition of the *Rheinische Zeitung*

The *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung* was published in Saxony, and it was therefore subject to Saxon rather than Prussian censorship. This made it possible for the journal to be somewhat more outspoken about events in Prussia than journals published in Prussia. The journal was therefore much read in Prussia.³⁹ On 28 December 1842, the Prussian government prohibited the distribution of the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung* within Prussia.⁴⁰ Disregarding all tactical considerations, Marx published a whole series of articles in which he criticized the decision. According to the government's decision, the journal had been prohibited due to its "lies, distortions, malicious attacks on and against Prussia, its institutions, its administration, its civil servants."⁴¹ According to Marx, this was no reason to prohibit the journal. Even if the accusations were right, they should be seen as failures of a young press under development. Whatever mistakes the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung* had made were "shortcomings which arise from the very nature of the popular press itself and therefore must be tolerated as arising in the course of its development, if its course of development is at all to be tolerated."⁴² Like life itself, the press is "always in a state of becoming, and never finished." It may fail today, but it will correct its failures tomorrow.⁴³ In order for the press to develop into a desirable higher level "it is above all necessary that it should not have any kind of purpose prescribed for it from outside, and that it should be accorded the recognition that is given even to a plant, namely, that it has its

own inherent laws, from which it cannot and should not arbitrarily withdraw."⁴⁴

Marx saw the attacks on the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung* as attacks on "the young popular press" as a whole.⁴⁵ He emphasized that his defence of the Leipzig journal had nothing to do with the specific nature or views of this journal (which was decidedly liberal and oppositional). It was a general defence of a free press:

Meanwhile, the article of ours which is incriminated spoke not of the past, but of the *present* character of the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung*, although it is self-evident that we would have no less serious objections against a ban on the *Elberfelder Zeitung*, the *Hamburger Correspondent*, or the *Rhein- und Mosel-Zeitung* published in Koblenz, since the *legal position* is not altered by the moral character or even the political and religious opinions of individuals. On the contrary, the *lack of rights* of the press is beyond all doubt once its *existence* is made dependent on its *frame of mind*. Up to now, indeed, there has been no legal code or court of law for a frame of mind.⁴⁶

Two of the journals he mentioned here, the *Elberfelder Zeitung* and the *Hamburger Correspondent*, were decidedly conservative. The *Rhein-und-Mosel-Zeitung* was considered moderately liberal.⁴⁷

From the very beginning of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, the Prussian authorities were highly dissatisfied with its performance. Government officials repeatedly discussed whether the journal should be subjected to stricter censorship or outright prohibited. Marx developed a considerable proficiency at dealing with the censorship. For instance, he often criticized conservative journals for their defense of the government, rather than criticizing the government directly. This could often appease the censor, who was instructed to remove criticism of the government, but higher government officials were

increasingly displeased. On 24 January 1843 the journal was informed that the Prussian government had annulled its license to publish, beginning on 1 April the same year. In the remaining short period, the *Rheinische Zeitung* would be subject to double censorship—after the regular censor had finished, an additional censor would censor it once more. Marx resigned as editor since he found it impossible to work under such complete control by the Prussian government.⁴⁸ The feelings appear to have been mutual; one Prussian official wrote that “Dr. Marx, whose ultrademocratic standpoints completely contradict the principle of the Prussian state, should consider emigration, which would be no loss.”⁴⁹

In a letter to his friend Arnold Ruge, Marx described the situation:

During this last respite, the newspaper is being subjected to a double censorship. Our censor, a decent man, is under the censorship of von Gerlach, Regierungspräsident here, a passively obedient blockhead. When ready, our newspaper has to be presented to the police to be sniffed at, and if the police nose smells anything un-Christian or un-Prussian, the newspaper is not allowed to appear.

This ban resulted from the combination of several special causes: our circulation; my “Justification of the Correspondent from the Mosel,” in which very highly placed statesmen were thoroughly exposed; our stubborn refusal to name the person who sent us the text of the law on marriage; the convocation of the provincial estates, which we could influence by our agitation; finally, our criticism of the ban on the *Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung* and on the *Deutsche Jahrbücher*.⁵⁰

However, Marx did not even suspect the most important reason why the journal was suspended. It was a reason that would have made

him furious. About ninety years later, historians found documents in the Prussian archives showing that the government of the Russian Tsar Nicholas I had launched a diplomatic protest with the Prussian government against an article on 4 January 1843 in which the journal had criticized the tsarist Russian régime. This was the direct reason why the journal was suppressed.⁵¹

5. Publication projects in Paris

Arnold Ruge was in a similar situation as Marx. In December 1842, Ruge's daily *Deutsche Jahrbücher* was deprived of its license to publish, which it had received only nine months earlier.⁵² Ruge planned to continue its publication in Switzerland, and in February 1843 he offered Marx a paid position as coeditor of the journal.⁵³ In their correspondence, this plan changed into publication in Paris of a journal to be called *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, with both German and French contributions.

Marx arrived in Paris in October 1843. Paris was a major centre for German emigrants, including large numbers of radical workers and intellectuals. One of the most prominent of the latter was Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), a leading poet and author who had emigrated to Paris in 1831 due to persecutions for his democratic ideas and his Jewish background. Heine and Marx developed a close friendship.⁵⁴ At the same time, Marx developed many contacts with radical workers, both Frenchmen and emigrants from Germany.

France had less repressive press policies than Germany, and Paris was a major place for publishing German journals and books that could not be published in Germany. Between 1830 and 1848, around twenty new German journals were started in Paris.⁵⁵ In February 1844, Ruge and Marx published the first issue of their *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*. It contained a poem by Heinrich Heine and contributions by notable German radicals such as Moses Hess, Friedrich Engels, Karl Ludwig Bernays, Johann Jacoby, and Georg Herwegh. Marx contributed two texts on political philosophy.

One of them contained strong criticism of the restrictions on human liberties, including the liberty of the press, which had been instigated during the Reign of Terror in the French Revolution:

Whereas, for example, security is declared one of the rights of man, violation of the privacy of correspondence is openly declared to be the order of the day. Whereas the “liberté *indéfinie* de la presse” (Constitution of 1793, Article 122) is guaranteed as a consequence of the right of man to individual liberty, freedom of the press is totally destroyed, because “la liberté de la presse ne doit pas être permise lorsqu'elle compromet la liberté publique.” [Quotation from Augustin Robespierre (“Robespierre jeune”), brother of Maximilien Robespierre.] That is to say, therefore: The human right to liberty ceases to be a right as soon as it comes into conflict with *political* life, whereas in theory political life is only the guarantee of human rights, the rights of the individual, and therefore must be abandoned as soon as it comes into contradiction with its *aim*, with these rights of man.⁵⁶

The *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* may have been a success in terms of contents, although it was certainly a drawback that the editors had failed to recruit any French contributors. However, Prussian suppression made the journal a commercial failure. An import ban was declared, and the Prussian police were successful in stopping most attempts to smuggle the journals into the country. About a third of the printed copies were confiscated, and very few were sold. In consequence, the first issue of the *Jahrbücher* became the last. In addition, the Prussian minister of interior issued a warrant for the arrest of Marx, Ruge, Heine, and Bernays. This meant that they would be arrested if they entered Prussian territory. It also

meant that the Prussian government would ask the French government to extradite them.

In June 1844 Marx and several of the other contributors to the now defunct *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* began to write for *Vorwärts*, a Paris-based German-language journal that was published twice a week. The journal was mildly critical of the Prussian government, but they managed to make it much more outspoken. Marx became one of the editors. However, the long arm of the Prussian government put a stop to their plans. In December 1844 Prussian authorities presented the French Minister of the Interior with a list of ten persons whom they required France to expel. In January 1845, the French government decided to expel four of them, namely Marx and three of the other editors of *Vorwärts*. This also meant the end of the journal.⁵⁷ On 3 February Marx travelled to Brussels in the hope of finding a new place for his activities as a journalist and researcher.

Just a few days before he left Paris, he signed a contract with a publisher based in Darmstadt for a book, "Kritik der Politik und Nationalökonomie," in two volumes.⁵⁸ The two volumes were to be delivered at the same time. Later, Marx explained this as necessary "because the publication of the *first* volume would lead to the banning or confiscation of the second."⁵⁹ As this shows, his plans for publication always had to take state suppression into account. (The contract was later annulled. In 1867, Marx published the first version of *Das Kapital*.)

6. Exile in Brussels

Belgium had a comparatively liberal government, and the country received quite a few refugees. However, Marx could only obtain a residence permit after he signed a document saying:

In order to obtain an authorization to live in Belgium
I agree on my honour to commit myself not to
publish in Belgium any work on day-to-day politics.⁶⁰

The Prussian government repeatedly tried to have him extradited. Although the Belgian government refused to hand him over, Marx gave up his Prussian subjecthood in December 1845 in order to protect himself against the risk of being deported to Prussia at some later point in time.

In April 1845 his close friend Friedrich Engels moved to Brussels in order to continue the close cooperation that the two had begun in Paris. They were now both convinced socialists, but they also held it to be impossible for the working class to take over the dominant role directly from the ruling aristocracy. Before that, the bourgeoisie would have to defeat the aristocracy. This led them to a two-tiered strategy. First, the aristocracy would have to be overthrown. This was a task for the bourgeoisie, although the working class would also contribute. After that it would become time for the working class, having developed into the majority of the population, to take over and transform society. In issues about freedom of the press, and freedom of expression in general, organizations of the working class and the bourgeoisie were usually in agreement, and therefore these issues suited very well for the cooperation between the two classes that would take part in the first phase of the two-tiered strategy.

Based on this strategy, Marx and his allies were at the same time active in Brussels in the Association Démocratique, which aimed for political reform, and the (secret) Communist League, which had its focus on social and economic change. At this time, the term “communism” referred to an economic system with communal ownership and equal distribution of the fruits of labor. (The association between communism and an anti-democratic political system came much later, with the Bolsheviks in the early twentieth century.⁶¹) On a meeting with a group of communists in Brussels in 1846, Marx is reported to have said that “for the time being, there could be no question of the realization of communism. First, the bourgeoisie would have to come into power.”⁶² In an article

published in Brussels in 1847, Marx claimed that the German workers "know that their own struggle against the bourgeoisie can only dawn on the day when the bourgeoisie has won."⁶³

The strategy of uniting with the bourgeoisie against the aristocracy was by no means uncontroversial. Other socialists had other priorities. A letter from Engels to Marx in 1847 gives an interesting insight into the strategic choices that Marx and Engels had made. Engels wrote about K.L. Bernays, who had been one of their coeditors of *Vorwärts* in Paris. Engels had visited him in France:

I spent about a week with Bernays in Sarcelles. He too does stupid things. Writes for the *Berliner Zeitungs-Halle* and is happy as a child that his soi disant communist exhortations against the bourgeoisie are printed there. The editors and censors naturally allow anything purely anti-bourgeois to stand, but delete the few allusions that might also be unpleasant for themselves. Fulminates about juries, "bourgeois freedom of the press," the representation system, etc. I explain to him that this means literally working *pour le roi de Prusse*, and indirectly, against our party—usual warm-hearted outpourings, impossibility of achieving anything; I point out that the *Zeitungs-Halle* is in the pay of the government [...].⁶⁴

The French phrase "travailler pour le roi de Prusse" means "work for nothing," but here Engels used it in its literal sense to work "for the king of Prussia."

Marx and Engels were asked by the Communist League to write a manifesto for the organization. This resulted in the *Communist Manifesto*, which is now one of the most read political tracts of all times. It is a bold and defiant declaration of the unavoidable future might of the working class, which will grow to be "the independent

movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority.”⁶⁵ The first step in the workers’ revolution would be “to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy.”⁶⁶ For that purpose, the communists “labour everywhere for the union and agreement of the democratic parties of all countries.”⁶⁷ The two-tiered strategy came out clearly in their criticism of the German so-called “true socialists” (Moses Heß, Karl Grün, and others), whom they accused of “hurling the traditional anathemas against liberalism, against representative government, against bourgeois competition, bourgeois freedom of the press, bourgeois legislation, bourgeois liberty and equality, and of preaching to the masses that they had nothing to gain, and everything to lose, by this bourgeois movement.”⁶⁸ Instead, the communists should “whenever the bourgeoisie acts in a revolutionary way” fight together with it “against the absolute monarchy, the feudal landed property, and the petty bourgeoisie.”⁶⁹ They had high hopes for an immediate and successful bourgeois revolution in Germany, and they maintained that it could soon be followed by a proletarian revolution:

The Communists turn their attention chiefly to Germany, because that country is on the eve of a bourgeois revolution that is bound to be carried out under more advanced conditions of the European civilization in general, and with a much more developed proletariat, than that of England was in the seventeenth, and of France in the eighteenth century, and because the bourgeois revolution in Germany can become just the immediate prelude to a proletarian revolution.⁷⁰

The *Manifesto* was written in December 1847 and January 1848, and was published in London in February 1848. Writing the *Manifesto* was not exactly in line with Marx’s promise three years earlier not to write anything about day-to-day politics. This had been observed by

the Belgian authorities, and on 3 March 1848, Marx was ordered to leave the country within 24 hours. On the very same day he received a letter from his friend the French democrat Ferdinand Flocon, who was a member of the provisional government that had just been formed in Paris after the king had fled to England. Flocon's message was that France was now again "a place of asylum for all friends of liberty," and that Marx was again welcome to live in France.⁷¹ Not having much of a choice, he and his family moved immediately to Paris.

7. Starting a new journal in Cologne

France was not the only country in Europe where the left made advances. The first half of 1848 was characterized by uprisings in city after city throughout Europe. Many of these protests were based on broad coalitions of both workers and liberal middle class who were tired of the autocratic monarchies. It started to look like the bourgeois revolution that was the first part of Marx's two-tiered strategy. In several countries, the monarchs made concessions in order to appease the opposition. Even the Prussian king found it necessary to go in that direction. In the middle of March he abolished censorship, and elections were announced for a National Assembly that would work out a constitution. The end of censorship created new possibilities for the press, and many new journals saw the light of day.⁷² Marx, Engels, and some of their close allies saw a chance to return to Germany and start a new journal. They chose between Cologne and Berlin as suitable places of publication, but settled for Cologne. The Rhineland Province and in particular Cologne, its largest city, had a strong tradition of opposition against the government in Berlin. Perhaps more importantly, the Rhineland had a different legal system than most parts of Prussia. It had retained French laws and legal procedures since it was part of France (until 1815). This meant that prosecutions of publishers would have to be tried by a jury, a system that was favorable to the accused in

comparison to the Prussian system where such cases would be tried by professional judges.⁷³

Marx arrived in Cologne in April 1848 and started intense preparations for the new journal. He obtained some funding from well-to-do democrats, but he also used money that he had recently inherited. (It has often been claimed that he used this money to buy guns for a planned uprising in Brussels, but the written evidence gives clear indications that he used it to buy office furniture and printing equipment in Cologne.⁷⁴) The new journal was named *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*. A prospectus for the journal was distributed. It has not been much discussed in the Marx literature, but it is remarkable not least for its similarities with the introduction of the Communist Manifesto. The Manifesto started with a description of a “spectre” that “is haunting Europe.”⁷⁵ The Prospect instead referred to a “new spirit” that had made a breakthrough in Germany:

A new spirit has broken through in Germany. It has overthrown the old regime, it has doomed the old world to destruction. It demands a new society, a new life.

It is the spirit of the *people*. The people [have] taken sovereign power, the people that does not want any division, any class rule, which regards its component parts as co-operating members of one great body. It is its will that is to guide its life, regulate its work, create its well-being.

The first task for this will is to create the forms in which it can develop its power, safe from oppression or falsification. These are the forms of *democracy*. Already the people [are] preparing to elect a double representation from which it expects the establishment of its rights, the division of the state powers and the guarantee of order, in short, a new Constitution.

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This is great, difficult work, even though only preparatory. The overthrown power will resist it, private interest will not voluntarily submit to the demands of the whole. Democracy must stand its ground in the struggle against both these enemies of an order which serves the will of the whole, and whose purpose is the good of the whole: it will have on its side the experiences of the past and the needs of the present.

The immediate aim of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* is to co-operate to the best of its ability in this immediate public work. [...] It will not close its columns to any tendencies except those stemming from absolutism or special interests, it will not represent any particular party within the democracy, it will not proceed according to any preconceived theory and will not prematurely reject any view, even if it has not yet found general sympathy. [...]

Political democracy is merely the means to achieve thoroughgoing changes in civil society. All wishes, all demands are directed to this end.⁷⁶

This whole text has a strong emphasis on the first part of Marx's two-tiered strategy for social transition. (The "double representation" that he mentioned referred to the fact that two national assemblies were to be elected, one for Prussia and the other for the German Confederation, *Deutscher Bund*.)

On 1 June 1848, the first issue of the new journal was published. On its first page, it carried the motto "Organ of democracy," which was to remain there in all future issues. Only two weeks after the first issue was printed, the journal was formally recognized by the first congress of German democrats as one of the three official organs of the democratic movement in Germany.⁷⁷

8. Repression by other means than censorship

In spite of the abolishment of censorship, Marx soon found himself in a fight with the authorities, just as when he published the *Rheinische Zeitung* a few years earlier. After the concessions in March 1848, the Prussian king and his government gradually tried to regain full control. Democratic organizations were infiltrated by police spies,⁷⁸ and democratic journals were prosecuted for various alleged crimes. When the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* had only been published about five weeks, the police searched the editorial offices, trying to find documents showing who was the author of an article that the journal had published.⁷⁹ The article had reported illegal and irregular behavior of the police force when Friedrich Anneke, one of the leading radicals in Cologne, was arrested for his pro-democratic political activities.⁸⁰ Marx noted that the police persecutions were even worse than in the times of the old *Rheinische Zeitung*. Even when the authorities searched for the source of the leaked draft of the divorce law, “there were neither house searches nor were examinations of compositors and the printshop owner resorted to.”⁸¹

In late September, political unrest arose due to the Armistice of Malmö, which ended the fighting between Prussian and Danish armed forces over the Duchy of Schleswig. It was seen by many German nationalists as a betrayal of the German-speaking part of the Sleswickian population. In response to the unrest and large public meetings, the military authorities in Cologne declared a state of emergency on 26 September. The right of association was temporarily annulled, and the publication of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* and three other journals was suspended.⁸² The suspension took place at the worst possible time for the journal. All subscriptions expired at the end of the month, and it was time for renewals. Not many readers could be expected to buy a subscription under these circumstances. However, Marx had recently obtained a loan from the Polish Democrat Wladyslaw Koscielski (1818-1895) to secure the publication of the journal, and the journal also obtained

loans from some citizens of Cologne. With great difficulties, the journal survived the economic crisis.⁸³ After two weeks of suspension, it reappeared on 12 October.

But persecutions and surveillance continued. Unsurprisingly, letters to the journal were intercepted. On one occasion, the journal received two letters from abroad that had both been opened in such a clumsy way that the original seals could not be reused. The new seals were not yet dry when the journal received the letters.⁸⁴ In November, three legal processes were ongoing against the journal.⁸⁵ The authorities continued to require information about who had written articles they disliked, such as an article disclosing corruption in the military.⁸⁶ Marx refused. The following short notice in the journal indicates the types of precautions that had to be taken to protect the journal's sources against the authorities:

We kindly inform the correspondent from Kassel
that all manuscripts are destroyed as soon as they
have been used. The editors.⁸⁷

In another short notice in the same issue, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* criticized several other journals that had republished one of their articles without crediting them.

It is our habit to cite the journal we use, and we
expect other papers to treat us in the same way.⁸⁸

States of emergency similar to that in Cologne were declared in other parts of Germany in the coming months. Marx subjected them to harsh criticism. For instance, when a state of emergency was declared in Düsseldorf in November 1848, he wrote a long article pointing out its illegality and protesting the groundless arrest of the prominent democrat and socialist Ferdinand Lassalle.⁸⁹

Defense of the freedom of expression, including but not restricted to the freedom of the press, was a prominent theme in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*. In July 1848, Marx wrote an article criticizing the use of libel laws to oppress clubs. Political discussions in oppositional clubs were prosecuted as libel against individual civil

servants, and these alleged crimes were also used as pretexts to prohibit clubs that displeased the authorities. “What is a club without freedom of speech?” asked Marx.⁹⁰ The journal followed this development closely and reported extensively on the oppression of clubs.⁹¹ They also protested strongly against a proposed new Prussian press law that would make it possible to prosecute almost any journal article that criticized the government or its authorities as libel of the responsible civil servants.⁹²

In September 1848, escalating conflicts between the Prussian king and the National Assembly in Berlin led to a crisis, and there were signs that the king might dissolve the National Assembly. Marx pointed out that the assembly had its mandate from the people, not from the king, and he clarified that since Prussia had no constitution, a potential dissolution would be a “a coup d’état.”⁹³ (He recognized that in a constitutional monarchy, the king can have the right to dissolve the parliament and call for a new election.⁹⁴) When mentioning the consequences of such a coup, he explicitly referred to freedom of the press. If that happened, “then the Assembly will be dissolved, the right of association abolished, the press muzzled, an electoral law based on property qualifications introduced.”⁹⁵ To prevent this, he proposed that the Prussian National Assembly should take power and exert “an energetic dictatorship.”⁹⁶

This reference to “dictatorship” may be surprising to a modern reader. Is not resolute action to protect the freedom of the press and the power of the popular representation the very opposite of dictatorship? It certainly is in the modern sense of that term, but not in the sense that it had in the nineteenth century. The term derives from the “dictatura” of the Romans. It referred to the assignment of considerable but time-limited executive powers to a single person in a time of crisis, such as war. (This is important for the interpretation of the term “dictatorship of the proletariat,” which Marx used on a few occasions. It did not refer to an unlimited despotism without popular control. That usage was introduced much later by the Bolsheviks.⁹⁷)

9. Increased Prussian repression

In March 1849, the Prussian king and his government took further steps toward stamping out the democratic opposition. Three new draft laws were presented that would restrict the freedom of expression. These were laws about associations, posters, and the press. Marx commented extensively on all three of them.

The proposed new law of associations imposed a significant bureaucratic burden on associations; in Marx's view they would have "to comply with such a mass of preparative announcements and formalities for the local authorities that for that reason alone their activity becomes almost impossible."⁹⁸ Even worse, they were forbidden to arrange meetings only for members. At least a fourth of the space would have to be reserved for non-members, which incurred a larger cost and—as Marx foresaw—would ensure that "paid agents of the police will be able to disrupt all discussion by noise, uproar and rowdy behaviour, and make every meeting impossible."⁹⁹ In addition, the police would be authorized to "immediately dissolve" any meeting if they saw reasons to do so.¹⁰⁰

The new law of posters was even more far-reaching. Political posters would be outright forbidden, and a special permit would be required for the distribution of handbills in the streets.¹⁰¹ This was an important restriction on political communication since posters and handbills were important means to spread political messages, in particular to those who could not afford to buy journals.¹⁰² Both Marx and Engels wrote articles opposing the law on posters. Engels described this as a defense of "the right of the *workers* to the *literature provided free of charge* in the form of posters."¹⁰³

The most remarkable feature of the proposed new press law was that it authorized the police to seize a book or journal without any court decision. They could do this when the distribution had just started, which could have much the same effect as censorship. Furthermore, they were allowed to seize printed matter wherever

they found it. No exception was made for private homes, which Marx found particularly outrageous:

The military despotism of the all-powerful French empire respected at least the freedom of private conversation; it remained—at any rate in its legislation—outside the threshold of the private dwelling. Prussian paternal constitutional supervision and punishment reaches into the inmost sanctum of the private dwelling, into the most secret refuge of family life, which even the barbarians regarded as inviolable. Yet the same law, three Articles earlier, punishes all attacks against the family by two years' imprisonment!¹⁰⁴

In several Prussian towns, the local press had been subjected to censorship under pretexts such as a state of emergency. The *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* (in an article with unclear authorship) quoted a journal in Rosenberg that excused itself for a delayed and incomplete issue that had been subject to “direct military censorship.”¹⁰⁵ Journals in Erfurt had been subjected to the same type of censorship, and the police in Erfurt had threatened the public with punishment if they distributed material critical of the government that had been printed elsewhere. The *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* accused the neighboring journals for cowardice since they did not protest the censorship and “our somnolent deputies” in Berlin for doing nothing about it.¹⁰⁶

The Prussian government was constantly on the offensive, pushing back the democratic opposition. A major means to achieve this was to restrict the freedom of press. Engels explained their strategy as follows:

The existing government and the constitutional monarchy in general cannot nowadays remain in power in civilised countries, if the press is free. Freedom of the press, free competition between opinions means giving freedom to the class struggle

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in the sphere of the press. And the kind of order that they ardently desire is precisely the stifling of the class struggle, the gagging of the oppressed classes. Hence the party of law and order has to abolish free competition between opinions in the press; by means of press laws, bans etc., it must as far as possible ensure its monopoly of the market; it must, in particular, wherever possible directly suppress the literature provided free of charge in the form of posters and leaflets.¹⁰⁷

Marx and his close allies maintained the two-tiered strategy, with its emphasis on an alliance with the bourgeoisie against the monarch and the aristocracy.¹⁰⁸ This became clear in a discussion in the Workers' Association in Cologne in January 1849, about the upcoming elections for the second chamber of the Prussian Parliament (Landtag). Although there was very little time to organize participation with candidates of their own, some members proposed that this was the right way to go. Marx maintained to the contrary that it would be better to join forces with the middle classes, since the immediate task was "to offer the strongest possible opposition to the absolutist system," and for that purpose "simple democrats, so-called liberals, who are also far from satisfied with the present Government, are sufficient."¹⁰⁹

The Prussian government had decided to get rid of Marx and his journal. They first used their standard trick of prosecuting criticism of the government as "libel" against individual civil servants. Marx was prosecuted for four such alleged offenses.¹¹⁰ In the trial, which took place in February 1849, Marx defended himself. In addition to tearing the prosecutor's legal arguments to pieces, he spoke of the importance of a free press in a tone similar to his first articles on the topic seven years earlier:

It is by profession the public watchdog, the tireless denouncer of those in power, the omnipresent eye,

the omnipresent mouthpiece of the people's spirit
that jealously guards its freedom.¹¹¹

He also explained why critical reporting on local dignitaries and civil servants was an essential task for the press:

But, firstly, it is the duty of the press to come forward on behalf of the oppressed in its immediate neighbourhood. And furthermore, gentlemen, the edifice of servitude has its most specific support in the subordinate political and social powers which directly confront the private life of an individual, of a living person. It is not sufficient to fight against general relationships and the highest authorities. The press must decide to take issue with a *specific* police officer, a *specific* public prosecutor, a *specific* Landrat.¹¹²

His speech appeared to have made an impression on the jury. Marx and the other accused editors were acquitted on all accounts. This was a big loss of prestige for the Prussian government. But it soon found another way to put an end to the journal. Several of the editors were not Prussian subjects. A decision to deport a foreigner could be made by the police, without involving any jury. Marx had tried since April 1848 to regain his Prussian subjecthood, but his application had been denied.¹¹³ On 16 May he received a police order saying that his journal had exhibited an increasing tendency to “provoke in its readers contempt for the present government, and incite them to violent revolution and the setting up of a social republic.” Therefore, Marx was deprived of “the right of hospitality which he so disgracefully abused.”¹¹⁴ He was ordered to leave the country within 24 hours, otherwise he would be forced across the border. There was nothing much that could be done against this. The journal published its last, defiant issue on 19 May—printed entirely in red ink—and Marx left Cologne.

The suppression of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* was part of a massive offensive by the Prussian state against all democratic and

oppositional organizations. For one example, the Workers' Association in Cologne was put under pressure. They responded by reorganizing as a Workers' Educational Association, i.e., an organization with the education of workers as its sole goal. This, however, was not sufficient. In 1850 the new, educational organization was prohibited since it did not have a license required for educational institutions.¹¹⁵ Even gymnastics clubs with no political activities whatsoever were prohibited due to suspicions that some of their members were democrats.¹¹⁶ Although Prussia did not reintroduce censorship, the press was subdued with extensive post-publication prosecutions that put a stop to oppositional journals.¹¹⁷ Within a few years, monarchical despotism was fully restored in Prussia.

10. London—the last resort

After leaving Cologne, Marx travelled in Germany until the beginning of June, when he arrived in Paris. However, Paris was no longer a safe place for democrats or socialists. The country had an anti-democratic president, Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte (who was going to make himself an emperor in a coup d'état a few years later). Marx lived under a false name, but it did not take long for the police to discover his true identity. On 19 July he received a police order to leave Paris for Morbihan in Brittany, which was the only place in the country where he was allowed to stay.¹¹⁸ This did not appeal to him, and on 24 August he left Paris for London. He lived there for the rest of his life, sharing his time between journalism, activism in the emerging international labor movement, and economic research for his magnum opus *Das Kapital*.

He did not have much of a choice. Britain was the only country in Europe where he could expect to live safely. The country had a long tradition of receiving political refugees of all political persuasions from the continent. (Between 1793 and 1905, not a single political refugee was expelled from Britain.¹¹⁹) In 1848, the country had received many conservative refugees, including the

French king Louis Philippe and the fervently anti-democratic Austrian politician Klemens von Metternich, but now it was mostly democrats who found their refuge there.

The generous attitude of the British government did not mean that the emigrants were free from political surveillance. Both Prussia and other German states had spies and infiltrators working for them in London.¹²⁰ One of the Prussian agents who spied on Karl Marx in London was Wilhelm Stieber (1818-1882), who later became a high civil servant (Geheimrat) under Bismarck.¹²¹ A report from a Prussian spy, probably written in the autumn of 1852, shows that at least one Prussian infiltrator managed to get invited into Marx's home. In the report, Marx is depicted as a "bad host" and as an unhygienic person, living in a dreadfully untidy home without a single piece of unbroken furniture.¹²²

In June 1850, after about a year's exile in London, Marx and two other German émigrés, Friedrich Engels and August Willich, wrote joint letters to English journals to report their experiences of police spies.

Really, Sir, we should have never thought that there existed in this country so many police-spies as we have had the good fortune of making the acquaintance of in the short space of a week. Not only that the doors of the houses where we live are closely watched by individuals of a more than doubtful look, who take down their notes very coolly every time any one enters the house or leaves it; we cannot make a single step without being followed by them wherever we go. We cannot get into an omnibus or enter a coffeehouse without being favoured with the company of at least one of these unknown friends.¹²³

Persons whom they believed to be Prussian agents had approached them and tried to make them join a conspiracy for regicide, which

they had refused.¹²⁴ For good reasons, they believed this to be an attempt to incriminate them sufficiently to convince the British government to extradite them from "this last refuge left to us in Europe."¹²⁵

Due to the repression in Prussia and other German states, it was difficult for emigrants to communicate with members of the opposition who still lived in Germany. Printed material sent to Germany was sure to be read by the police, who would burn it if they considered it to be oppositional. In March 1853, Marx wrote in a newspaper article that two thousand copies of a pamphlet that he had published in Basle had been seized at the border between Switzerland and Baden and sent to the flames on the request of the Prussian government.¹²⁶

As late as in 1871, Marx had an amusing experience with a police spy who had followed him on a trip to Brighton. He wrote to his wife:

The second day after my arrival here, I met a chap in a waiting posture at the corner of my street. He was the same man whom I told you about before as having accompanied Engels and myself on our way home on a number of occasions. Engels had thought he was a spy and we once gave him a "hint." You know that generally speaking, I am not good at detecting spies. But this fellow has obviously and undeniably dogged my every step down here. Yesterday, I became fed up with it, so I stopped, turned round and stared at him with my notorious eyeglass. What did he do? He doffed his hat very humbly and today he no longer honoured me with the pleasure of his company.¹²⁷

Still in 1882, the year before his death, it was impossible for him to travel through Germany or Italy due to the risk of police harassment.¹²⁸

11. Journalism in London

During his first year in London, Marx made arrangements for the publication of his own collected essays. The first part was published in Cologne in 1851. It consisted of his two long articles from 1842 on the freedom of the press, without any changes or added explanations. The republication shows how closely continuous he considered his first writings on freedom of the press to be with his views three years after the *Communist Manifesto*. Unfortunately, the publication of his collected essays also confirmed another continuity, namely that between Prussian oppression in 1842 and nine years later. Marx had prepared the manuscript for a second volume, but the publication of additional volumes was stopped by the Prussian government's intimidations of the print shop.¹²⁹

In 1850 Marx also started a political magazine that was published in Hamburg (which was not a part of Prussia). Marx planned it to be weekly or fortnightly, but it became a monthly journal. Its name was *Neue Rheinische Zeitung. Politisch-ökonomische Revue*, and it consisted mainly of articles that continued the political analysis of its predecessor. Marx contributed several articles that analyzed the political developments in France since the beginning of 1848. He specifically mentioned the oppressive press laws that had been introduced by reactionary governments in France. The increased caution money had in his view been the death-blow to "the so-called revolutionary press,"¹³⁰ which was, as he wrote in another article, already under extreme pressure: "week by week, paper after paper and pamphlet after pamphlet, were accused, fined, suppressed."¹³¹ Another new regulation required that every article should be signed by its author. According to Marx, this had a negative effect on all parts of the press:

As long as the newspaper press was anonymous, it appeared as the organ of a numberless and nameless public opinion; it was the third power in the state.

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Through the signature of every article, a newspaper
became a mere collection of literary contributions
from more or less known individuals.¹³²

He also criticized the introduction of a stamp tax on feuilleton novels.¹³³ In an article for an English journal, he asserted that the climax of the French repressive legislation was the "the law of July 30, 1850, which restored the censorship of the drama. Thus freedom of opinion was banished from its last literary refuge."¹³⁴ At the same time, associations were subjected to detailed police regulation, and workers who united for a rise in wages would face up to three months' imprisonment.

In the years 1852-1862, Marx and Engels published a large number of articles in the *New York Daily Tribune*. This was an important source of income for Marx, who was almost constantly short of money. It was also an important means to reach a large public. The *Tribune* was probably the most influential newspaper in the US at this time. It was left-of-centre and a strong opponent of slavery. The articles by Marx and Engels were initially published with their signatures, but from about 1855 they were largely used by the *Tribune* as unsigned lead articles.¹³⁵

Although there was no censorship on printed material in Britain, other legal regulations were in place that limited the press. Most important of these were the so-called taxes on knowledge: the stamp tax (per newspaper), the advertising tax, and the tax on paper. In combination, they made the price of a newspaper considerably higher than what it would otherwise have been. In particular, they prevented the publication of cheap newspapers that the poor could afford. On several occasions, representatives of the government actually conceded that this was the purpose of these taxes.¹³⁶ Marx wrote extensively on the taxes on knowledge, both in the *Tribune* and in British journals. Unsurprisingly, he was a strong opponent of these taxes.¹³⁷ He saw this as a matter of freedom of the press. For instance, when a newspaper vendor was charged for having sold a

newspaper that was printed on untaxed paper, he described the incident as an example of the status of the liberty of the press in England.¹³⁸

In 1853 the British government responded to the many demands to abolish the taxes on knowledge with a surprising proposal. Instead of abolishing these taxes in general, it proposed the abolition of the stamp duty on newspaper supplements. However, there was only one journal, namely the *Times*, that published such supplements. Marx did not mince his words:

It would be difficult to find in all the Parliamentary history of Great Britain, a more undignified act than this of Mr. Gladstone, buying up the support of a journal by inserting a special provision for it in the budget. The abolition of the Taxes on Knowledge was chiefly asked for with a view to break down the monopoly of the newspaper-leviathans. The ‘unctuous’ Mr. Gladstone adopts only so much of that measure as tends exactly to double the monopoly of *The Times*.¹³⁹

When the taxes on knowledge were finally abolished in 1855, Marx criticized the established British press for their “shameless and willing opposition” to the Bill. Their opposition was a further proof that these taxes had been a “protective tariff system for the established press and a system prohibiting free mental production.”¹⁴⁰ He relished the many new newspapers that were now started, in particular the “penny papers” that would be affordable for the working class. He was also supportive of the large number of new papers that would be published outside of London, leading to a “decentralisation of journalism.”¹⁴¹

Marx was also critical of the established British press for its lack of independence. In 1861 he published an article that named leading editors who also held lucrative positions in the government, journals that were owned by the beer and liquor industry, and other

journals that apparently received money from the the French Embassy.¹⁴² (According to what Marx wrote in a private letter in 1860, a representative of the French provisional government had offered him and Engels money for *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, but they declined since they did not consider it appropriate for a German paper to receive money from the French government.¹⁴³)

In early January 1871 Marx wrote an article in the English newspaper *The Daily News* with the title "On the freedom of the press and meetings in Germany," describing the oppression under Bismarck. The leaders of the labor movement had been arrested and accused of high treason since they favored negotiations with France to end the Franco-Prussian war. Journalists were also arrested for political reasons, and the same applied to many workmen who supported the demand for peace with France. Marx accused the Prussian government of applying "the crudest and most revolting form of military despotism, the suspension of all law."¹⁴⁴ He particularly denounced its attempts to make other governments implement Prussian directives on what could and couldn't be written about Prussia in newspapers. For example,

the Prussian ambassador at Brussels, Herr von Balan, invited the Belgian ministry to put down not only all anti-Prussian newspaper articles, but even the printing of mere news calculated to cheer on the French in their war of independence. A very modest request this, indeed, to suspend the Belgian Constitution, "pour le roi de Prusse!" No sooner had some Stockholm papers indulged in some mild jokes at the notorious "piety" of Wilhelm Annexander [King Wilhelm I of Prussia], than Bismarck came down on the Swedish cabinet with grim missives. Even under the meridian of St. Petersburg he contrived to spy too licentious a press. At his humble supplication, the editors of the principal

Petersburg papers were summoned before the Censor-in-Chief, who bid them beware of all strictures upon the feal [faithful] Borussian [Prussian] vassal of the Czar. One of those editors, M. Saguljajew, was imprudent enough to emit the secret of this *avertissement* through the columns of the *Golos*. He was at once pounced upon by the Russian police, and bundled off to some remote province.¹⁴⁵

12. Conclusion

The repression of journalism and political opposition perpetrated by the Prussian government and other anti-democratic régimes in Europe had a strong impact on Marx. In many ways, it shaped his life. He spent two intensive periods on the journalistic frontline, first fighting censorship (*Rheinische Zeitung*) and then fighting the post-production prosecutions that replaced it (*Neue Rheinische Zeitung*). His fight against the Prussian repression of the press was the major reason why he had to flee his home country and spend most of his adult life in exile. This is a factor that has largely been neglected in discussions about his theoretical and strategic approach to social transformation.

Marx was not alone in this. Autocratic régimes on the European continent put limits—often tight and thwarting ones—not only on politics but also on literature, drama, and scholarship. The lives of nineteenth-century academics, literary writers, artists, and promoters of social improvement were largely shaped by incessant confrontations with censors and other servants of oppressive governments. Some, like Abraham Jacobi and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, were incarcerated several years as political prisoners. Others, like Karl Marx and Heinrich Heine, had to spend a large part of their lives in exile. Those who managed to elude such consequences of the oppression often did so at the price of adjusting

their words and actions to the dictates of oppressive régimes. This is an aspect of nineteenth-century societies that we need to study carefully, both in order to improve our interpretations of political and intellectual developments during that century and in order to better understand some of the dangers of our own times.

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Notes

MEGA² refers to the still incomplete *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe* (1975-), which is the preferred source for texts by Karl Marx. MEW refers to *Marx-Engels, Werke* (1956-1972) and MECW to *Marx/Engels Collected Works* (1975-2004). When MECW is given as one of the sources of a text that was not written originally in English, the translation follows the MECW, unless otherwise stated. An asterisk (MECW*) denotes that the translation has been modified.

¹ Robert Justin Goldstein, *Political Censorship of the Arts and the Press in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. (New York: St. Martin's Press 1989), 38-43, 65.

² Lenore O'Boyle, "The image of the Journalist in France, Germany, and England, 1815-1848," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (April 1968), 305.

³ Matthew Bunn, "'Censorship is Official Critique': Contesting the Limits of Scholarship in the Censorship of the Hallische Jahrbücher," *Central European History*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (June 2014), 375.

⁴ Surprisingly little has been written on Marx's views on freedom of expression or on his activities as a journalist. Fetscher edited a collection of texts by Marx on liberty of the press (*Karl Marx. Friedrich Engels. Pressefreiheit und Zensur*, ed. Iring Fetscher (Vienna: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1969), and Padover, a collection of texts on this topic by both Marx and Engels, translated into English, *On Freedom of the Press and Censorship*:

Karl Marx, ed. Saul K. Padover (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974). Both volumes have an almost exclusive focus on texts from 1842 and 1848-1849. Hardt provides a summary of Marx's arguments for freedom of the press, with a strong emphasis on the 1842 articles. Hanno Hardt, "Communication is Freedom: Karl Marx on Press Freedom and Censorship," *Javnost—The Public*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (2000), 85-99. Leeper compares Marx's standpoints on censorship, as expressed in his 1842 articles, to John Milton's standpoints on the same issue (Roy V. Leeper, "Strange Bedfellows: John Milton and Karl Marx on Censorship," *Free Speech Yearbook*, Vol. 34 (1996), 24-40. Rose discusses how Marx's poetry (written 1835-1837) may have been influenced by censorship. Margaret A. Rose, *Reading the young Marx and Engels: Poetry, Parody and the Censor* (London: Croom Helm, 1978). Teschner made an attempt to fit Marx's fight for freedom of the press into Stalinist orthodoxy. Hans Teschner, "Der publizistische Kampf von Marx und Engels in der 'Neuen Rheinischen Zeitung' für die Verwirklichung der demokratischen Rechte und Freiheiten," *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg. Gesellschafts- und sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1953), 119-26. Kurz and Haase discuss Marx's journalism, in particular his contributions to the *New York Daily Tribune*. Heinz D. Kurz, "Transatlantic Conversations: Observations on Marx and Engels' Journalism and Beyond," *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, Vol. 81, No. 3 (Fall 2014), 637-55. Fee-Alexandra Haase, "Revolutions as Sensational Writing: Karl Marx as London correspondent for *The New York Tribune* (1852-1861)," *Neohelicon*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (June 2009), 201-14). Haase connects this topic to Marx's experience of Prussian censorship. Chakravorti wrote a brief summary of Marx's journalistic activities, also mentioning his fight against censorship (Robi Chakravorti, "Marx the Journalist," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 28, No. 36 (1993), 1856-59). As compared to previous research, this

contribution has a broader perspective on Marx's views on freedom of expression, connecting them with his journalistic principles as an editor-in-chief and with the many ways in which autocratic repression affected and arguably shaped his life.

⁵ MEGA² III.1:21 (MEW 27:395, MECW 1:381). "Jahrbücher" means yearbooks, but in spite of its name this periodical was published six days a week.

⁶ MEGA² III.1:370. My translation.

⁷ MEGA² III.1:22 (MEW 27:397, MECW 1:382).

⁸ MEGA² I.1: 97-118 (MEW1:3-27, MECW 1:109-31).

⁹ MEGA² III.1:35 (MEW 40:397, MECW 1:285). My translation.

¹⁰ MEGA² I.25:100n (MEW 19:96n, MECW 24:183).

¹¹ MEGA² III.1:37 (MEW 27:411, MECW* 1:393).

¹² MEGA² III.1:37-39 (MEW 27:411-413, MECW 1:393-95) and MEGA² III.1:34 (MEW 40:395-396, MECW 1:283-84).

¹³ Boris Nicolaevsky and Otto J. Maenchen-Helfen, *Karl Marx: Eine Biographie* (Hannover: J.H.W. Dietz, 1963), 55.

¹⁴ MEGA² I.1:1051.

¹⁵ MEGA² I.1:297-98 (MEW 1:173-74, MECW* 1:333-34).

¹⁶ MEGA² I.1:1077.

¹⁷ MEGA² I.1:153 (MEW1:60-61, MECW* 1:164-65).

¹⁸ MEGA² I.1:313 (MEW 1:189-90, MECW* 1:349). This is part of one of his articles on the Mosel farmers.

¹⁹ MEGA² I.1:159 (MEW1:67, MECW 1:171).

²⁰ MEGA² I.1:162-63 (MEW 1:70-71, MECW* 1:174-75).

²¹ MEGA² I.1:143 (MEW1:50, MECW 1:155).

²² MEGA² I.1:143 (MEW1:51, MECW 1:155).

²³ MEGA² I.1: 143 (MEW1:51, MECW 1:155).

²⁴ MEGA² I.1:141 (MEW 1:48, MECW* 1:153).

²⁵ MEGA² I.1:146 (MEW 1:54, MECW* 1:158).

²⁶ MEGA² I.1: 152 (MEW 1:60, MECW 1:164).

²⁷ MEGA² I.1:113-14 (MEW 1:20, MECW* 1:126).

²⁸ MEGA² I.1:114 (MEW 1:21, MECW 1:126).

²⁹ MEGA² I.1:99 (MEW 1:5, MECW 1:111).

³⁰ MEGA² I.1: 99-100 (MEW 1:5-6, MECW* 1:111-12).

³¹ MEGA² I.1:100 (MEW 1:6, MECW* 1:112).

³² MEGA² I.1:176 (MEW 1:90, MECW 1:188).

³³ MEGA² I.1:154 (MEW 1:62, MECW 1:166).

³⁴ MEGA² I.1:107 (MEW 1:13, MECW 1:119).

³⁵ MEGA² I.1:107 (MEW 1:14, MECW 1:119-20).

³⁶ MEGA² I.1:345 (MEW 1:168, MECW 1:327).

³⁷ Goldstein, 44-54.

³⁸ MEGA² I.2:155 (MEW 1:63, MECW 1:167). See also an article by Engels, MEGA² 1.3:376-85 (MEW 41:271-78, MECW 2:304-11).

³⁹ Veit Valentin, *Geschichte der deutschen Revolution 1848-1849*. 2 Vols. (Frankfurt a.M.: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1977), 1:47.

⁴⁰ MEGA² I.1:1072.

⁴¹ MEGA² I.1:1072. My translation.

⁴² MEGA² I.1:328 (MEW 1:155, MECW* 1:314).

⁴³ MEGA² I.1:291-92 (MEW 1:153, MECW* 1:312).

⁴⁴ MEGA² I.1:329 (MEW 1:155, MECW* 1:314).

⁴⁵ MEGA² 1:292 (MEW 1:154, MECW 1:313).

⁴⁶ MEGA² I.1:332 (MEW 1:157, MECW* 1:316).

⁴⁷ MEGA² I.1:1299-1301.

⁴⁸ MEGA² I.1: 366 (MEW 1:200, MECW 1:376).

⁴⁹ Auguste Cornu, *Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels: Leben und Werk*, Vol. 1 (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1954), 350. My translation.

⁵⁰ MEGA² III.1:40 (MEW 27:414, MECW* 1:396).

⁵¹ Nicolaevsky and Maenchen-Helfen, 59-61. Boris Nicolaevsky, "Who Is Distorting History?" *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 105, No. 2 (21 April 1961), 213n.

⁵² Bunn 2014.

⁵³ MEGA² III.1:389-91.

⁵⁴ Nigel Reeves, "Heine and the Young Marx," *Oxford German Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1972), 44-97. Wolff A. von Schmidt, "Heine und Marx," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, Vol. 54 (1972), 143-52).

⁵⁵ Jacques Grandjonc, "Deutsche Emigrationspresse in Europa während des Vormärz 1830-1848," in *Heinrich Heine und die Zeitgenossen*, ed. Anon. (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1979), 229-97.

⁵⁶ MEGA² I.2:159-60 (MEW 1:367, MECW* 3:165).

⁵⁷ MEGA² I.2 555-68.

⁵⁸ MEGA² III.1:851-52.

⁵⁹ MEGA² III.2:22 (MEW 27:447, MECW* 38:49).

⁶⁰ Luc Somerhausen, *L'humanisme agissant de Karl Marx* (Paris: Richard Masse, 1946), 77. My translation.

⁶¹ David Ramsay Steele, *From Marx to Mises: Post-capitalist Society and the Challenge of Economic Calculation* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1992), Chapter 2.iii.c.

⁶² Moses Hess, *Briefwechsel*, ed. Edmund Silberner (The Hague: Mouton, 1959), 151.

⁶³ MEW 4:352 (MECW* 6:332-33).

⁶⁴ MEGA² III.2:86 (MEW 27:78, MECW* 38:113).

⁶⁵ MEW 4:472 (MECW* 6:495).

⁶⁶ MEW 4:481 (MECW 6:504).

⁶⁷ MEW 4:493 (MECW 6:519).

⁶⁸ MEW 4:487 (MECW 6:511). On the so-called true socialists, see Stefan Koslowski, "Kritik des 'deutschen Sozialismus,'" in *Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels: Die Deutsche Ideologie*, ed. Harald Bluhm (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2010), 441-532.

⁶⁹ MEW 4:492 (MECW* 6:519).

⁷⁰ MEW 4:493 (MECW* 6:519).

⁷¹ MEGA² III.2:389. My translation.

⁷² Wolfram Siemann, *Die deutsche Revolution von 1848/49* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1985), 59 and 67.

⁷³ François Melis, *Neue Rheinische Zeitung. Organ der Demokratie. Edition unbekannter Nummern, Flugblätter*,

Druckvarianten und Separatdrucke (Munich: K.G. Saur, 2000), 26. MEGA² I.30:16-17 (MEW 21:18-19, MECW 26:123).

⁷⁴ Gareth Stedman Jones, *Karl Marx. Die Biographie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2017), 299-302. Cf. MEGA² III.2:172 (MEW 27:485, MECW 38:182).

⁷⁵ MEW 4:461 (MECW 6:481).

⁷⁶ Melis, 41-42. (MECW* 7:539-40).

⁷⁷ Gerhard Becker, "Das Protokoll des ersten Demokratenkongresses vom Juni 1848," *Jahrbuch für Geschichte*, Vol 8 (1973), 379-405, 389.

⁷⁸ Siemann, 134. MEGA² I.8:245 (MEW 6:131, MECW 8:190-91).

⁷⁹ MEGA² I.7:280 (MEW 5:484-85, MECW 7:554) and MEGA² 1.7:303-6 (MEW 5:198-201, MECW 7:208-11).

⁸⁰ MEGA² I.7:251-53 (MEW 5:166-68, MECW 7:177-79).

⁸¹ MEGA² 1.7:303 (MEW 5:198, MECW 7:208).

⁸² Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln, *Karl Marx und Köln 1842-1852. Briefe—Texte—Bilder—Faksimiles Ausstellung zum 100 Todestag*, 1983, 140-41.

⁸³ MEGA² III.2:757. MEGA² III.2:164 (MEW 27:129-30, MECW 38:178-79). Melis, 34-36 and 83-85.

⁸⁴ MEGA² I.8:157 (MECW 8:96).

⁸⁵ MEGA² I.8:145-46 (MEW 6:62-63, MECW 8:81-82).

⁸⁶ MEGA² III.3: 13-14 (MEW 27:496-97, MECW 38:192-93) and MEGA² III.3: 793-94.

⁸⁷ Melis, 241. My translation.

⁸⁸ Melis, 241. My translation.

⁸⁹ MEGA² I.8:136-40 (MEW 6:56-61, MECW 8:75-80). See also MEW 6:351-52 (MECW 9:70-71) and an article by Engels in MEGA² I.7:426-27 (MEW 5:276-77, MECW 7:288-89).

⁹⁰ MEGA² I.7:305 (MEW 5:200, MECW 7:210).

⁹¹ MEGA² I.7:364-65 (MEW 5:238-39, MECW 7:248-49) and MEGA² I.8:138 (MEW 6:58, MECW 8:77).

⁹² MEGA² I.7:366-68 (MEW 5:240-42, MECW 7:250-52). This article was probably written by Engels but was ascribed to Marx in MEW and MECW.

⁹³ MEGA² I.7:696 (MEW 5:400, MECW 7:429).

⁹⁴ MEGA² I.7:695 (MEW 5:399, MECW 7:428).

⁹⁵ MEGA² I.7:697 (MEW 5:400, MECW 7:429).

⁹⁶ MEGA² I.7:698 (MEW 5:402, MECW 7:431).

⁹⁷ Hal Draper, "Marx and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat," *New Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Summer 1962), 91-104. In a speech in 1848, Marx argued that in a future workers' government "the governing power, just as the Provisional Government in Paris, must consist of the most heterogeneous elements, which by means of an exchange of views have to agree on the most appropriate mode of administration." MEGA² I.7:769 (MECW 7:556-57).

⁹⁸ MEW 6:340 (MECW* 9:51).

⁹⁹ MEW 6:339 (MECW 9:50).

¹⁰⁰ MEW 6:339 (MECW 9:50).

¹⁰¹ MEW 6:340 (MECW 9:51).

¹⁰² Jürgen Herres, *1848/49 Revolution in Köln* (Cologne: Janus, 1998), 62.

¹⁰³ MEW 6:437 (MECW 9:324).

¹⁰⁴ MEW 6:342 (MECW 9:53). See also MEW 6:365-66 (MECW 9:126-27).

¹⁰⁵ MEW 6:351 (MECW 9:70).

¹⁰⁶ MEW 6:352 (MECW 9:71).

¹⁰⁷ MEW 6:441 (MECW 9:327).

¹⁰⁸ Nicolaevsky, 220-21. Stedman Jones, 355.

¹⁰⁹ MEGA² I.8:542-43 (MEW 6:579, MECW 8:514). However, he had become convinced that the German bourgeoisie was incapable of defeating the ancien régime on its own. In December 1848 he wrote that "a purely *bourgeois revolution* and the establishment of *bourgeois rule* in the form of a *constitutional monarchy* is impossible in Germany." Therefore, the only

alternative to the absolutist government was “the *social republican revolution*,” MEGA² I.8:215 (MEW 6:124, MECW* 8:178). This was quoted in the very last issue of the journal, MEW 6:505 (MECW 9:453). This enthusiasm for running the bourgeois revolution seems to have waned in the coming years. In a letter written in 1853, Engels expressed worries about the difficulties that “our party” would encounter if “the helplessness and spinelessness of all the others” would force them to power in a revolution of the bourgeoisie. One of the risks was that “we shall find ourselves compelled to make communist experiments and leaps which no one knows better than ourselves to be untimely,” MEW 28:580 (MECW 39:308-9). On Marx’s political strategy, see Rolf Peter Sieferle, *Die Revolution in der Theorie von Karl Marx* (Frankfurt a.M.: Ullstein, 1979) and Richard N. Hunt, *The political ideas of Marx and Engels*, 2 Vols. (London: Macmillan, 1975 and 1984).

¹¹⁰ MEGA² I.8:186 (MEW 6:574, MECW 8:504).

¹¹¹ MEGA² I.8:417 (MEW 6:231, MECW 8:314).

¹¹² MEGA² I.8:419-20 (MEW 6:234, MECW* 8:316).

¹¹³ MEGA² I.7:1518.

¹¹⁴ MEW 6:503 (MECW* 9:451).

¹¹⁵ Historisches Archiv, 164.

¹¹⁶ Marcel Seyppel, *Die Demokratische Gesellschaft in Köln 1848/49* (Cologne: Janus 1991), 283.

¹¹⁷ Goldstein, 45.

¹¹⁸ MEW 6:695.

¹¹⁹ Adam Zamoyski, *Phantome des Terrors* (Munich: C.H. Beck 2016), 463-64.

¹²⁰ Siemann, 222.

¹²¹ Francis Wheen, *Karl Marx* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999), 163.

¹²² Gustav Mayer, “Neue Beiträge zur Biographie von Karl Marx,” *Archiv für Geschichte des Sozialismus und der Arbeiterbewegung*, Vol. 10 (1922), 54-66.

- ¹²³ MEGA² I.10:345 (MECW 10:381, MEW 7:316).
¹²⁴ MEGA² I.10:344 (MECW 10:379, MEW 7:314).
¹²⁵ MEGA² I.10:346 (MECW 10:382, MEW 7:317).
¹²⁶ MEGA² I.12:63 (MECW 11:537, MEW 8:550).
¹²⁷ MEW 33:272 (MECW* 44:206).
¹²⁸ MEW 35:265 (MECW 46:186-87).
¹²⁹ MEGA² I.10:1020-23.
¹³⁰ MEGA² I.10:474 (MEW 7:448, MECW 10:137).
¹³¹ MEGA² I.10:539 (MECW 10:569, MEW 7:496).
¹³² MEGA² I.10: 474 (MEW 7:448-49, MECW 10:138).
¹³³ MEGA² I.10:474 (MEW 7:100, MECW 10:137) and MEGA² I.10:539 (MEW 7:496, MECW 10:569).
¹³⁴ MEGA² I.10:539 (MECW 10:569, MEW 7:496).
¹³⁵ Kurz, "Transatlantic Conversations."
¹³⁶ Goldstein, 53-54, 57, and 66.
¹³⁷ See for instance MEGA² I.12:116 (MECW 12:58, MEW 9:57), MEGA² I.12:211-13 (MECW 12:175-77, MEW 9:177-79), MEGA² I.12:225 (MECW 12:190-91, MEW 9:194), MEGA² I.14:99 (MEW 11:41, MECW 13:639), MEGA² I.14:233 (MEW 11:157, MECW 14:120), MEGA² I.14:236-38 (MEW 11:158-60, MECW 14:121-23), MEGA² I.14:423-24 (MEW 11:304, MECW 14:281-82), MECW 15:230 (MEW 12:160), and MECW 19:21 (MEW 15:318).
¹³⁸ MEGA² I.12:66 (MECW 11:540, MEW 8:553-54).
¹³⁹ MEGA² I.12:124 (MECW 12:71-72, MEW 9:72).
¹⁴⁰ MEGA² I.14:236 (MEW 11:158, MECW* 14:121-22).
¹⁴¹ MEGA² I.14:424 (MEW 11:304, MECW 14:281-282).
¹⁴² MEW 15:430-33 (MECW 19:128-29).
¹⁴³ MEGA² III.10:346 (MEW 30:510, MECW 41:102).
¹⁴⁴ MEGA² I.21:502 (MECW 22:275, MEW 17:284).
¹⁴⁵ MEGA² I.21:502 (MECW 22:275-76, MEW 17:284-85).

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