

## Moses Hess: The Red Rabbi

### Part 2: Writings and Revolution

In 1841 Moses Hess met Karl Marx.

He wrote to a friend, "He is the greatest, perhaps the only true philosopher actually now alive . . . Dr Marx - that is the name of my idol - is still a very young man (about twenty-four at the most), and will strike the final death blow at medieval religion and politics. He combines philosophical depth with a most biting wit: imagine Rousseau, Voltaire, Holbach, Lessing, Heine and Hegel - not thrown together anyhow, but fused into a single personality - and you will have Dr Marx."

Together they collaborated on the *Rheinische Zeitung*, a liberal paper, of which Hess became editor. It was Hess who introduced the young Friedrich Engels to his circle and to communism. Over the next several years the three were close. Hess' writings, ideas and influence are evident in the 1848 Communist Manifesto. Some even attribute to Hess the line that "Religion is the opiate of the masses."

Accused of being too radical, of agitation for violent communist action in Germany, Hess moved to France. He met Sibylle Pesch, who is described in a Cologne Police Dossier as a street-walker. This is improbable; she was a pious Catholic. It appears they never married, out of respect of his, and possibly also, her father. They would stay together till his death in 1875 and she published his remaining works in 1877.

Over the 1843-48 period, Hess moved between Paris, Zurich and Brussels. His circle included Marx, Engels and Heine. He wrote many articles for radical publications including his 1846 "*Kommunistisches Bekenntnis in Fragen und Antworten*" a Communist Credo FAQ.

In 1848, revolutions flared in Europe, starting with Berlin where the communists demanded unification of Germany, universal suffrage and abolition of feudal duties. Commentators on the revolutions note that much of the inspiration and theory came from middle class agitators; but it was the lower classes and workers who were the cannon fodder. Hess moved between Paris, Cologne, Geneva, Basle and Strasbourg.

In 1850 he moved back to Geneva where he headed the local League of Communists. He continued to travel and write. The Prussians sought to arrest him. He was expelled from Belgium and in 1853 came back to Paris which remained his base for the next 25 years.

There is an account that Engels, who smuggled Sybille from Belgium and back to France in 1853, had a brief affair with her. Some suggest this was a turning point in Hess' relationship with his former friends and their movement. This period sees him diversify his writing to include natural sciences. He joined the Freemasons. He began a correspondence with the German Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz and would later translate Volume 3 of Graetz's "History of the Jews" into French.

In 1860 he started writing "Rome and Jerusalem". His second chapter begins:

"The great teachers of the knowledge of God were always Jews. Our people not only created the noblest religion of the ancient world, a religion which is destined to become the common property of the entire civilized world, but continued to develop it, keeping pace with the progress of the human spirit. And this mission will remain with the Jews until the end of days, i.e., until the time when, according to the promise of our Prophets, the world will be filled with the knowledge of God. The "end of days," so often spoken of by the Prophets, is not to be understood to mean, as some misinterpret it, the end of the world, but it denotes the period when the development and education of humanity will reach their highest point.

We are on the eve of the Sabbath of History and should prepare for our last mission through a thorough understanding of our historical religion.

We cannot understand a single word of the Holy Scriptures, so long as we do not possess the point of view of the genius of the Jewish nation which produced these writings."

"Rome and Jerusalem" was published in 1862. Hess resumed writing about workers, unaware that he had just authored an entirely unexpected revolution.