

# ESSAY

## New Profiles of Marx after the *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA<sup>2</sup>)

MARCELLO MUSTO

York University

[marcello.musto@gmail.com](mailto:marcello.musto@gmail.com)

### I. The Marx Revival

For more than a decade now, prestigious newspapers and journals with a wide readership have been describing Karl Marx as a far-seeing theorist whose topicality receives constant confirmation. Many authors with progressive views maintain that his ideas continue to be indispensable for anyone who believes it is necessary to build an alternative to capitalism. Almost everywhere, he is now the theme of university courses and international conferences. His writings, reprinted or brought out in new editions, have reappeared on bookshop shelves, and the study of his work, after twenty years or more of neglect, has gathered increasing momentum. The years 2017 and 2018 have brought further intensity to this “Marx revival,”<sup>1</sup> thanks to many initiatives around the world linked to the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of *Capital* and the bicentenary of Marx’s birth.

Marx’s ideas have changed the world. Yet despite the affirmation of Marx’s theories, turned into dominant ideologies and state doctrines for a considerable part of humankind in the twentieth century, there is still no full edition of all his works and manuscripts. The main reason for this lies in the incomplete character of Marx’s oeuvre; the works he published amount to considerably less than the total number of projects left unfinished, not to speak of the mountainous *Nachlass* of notes connected with his unending researches. Marx left many more manuscripts than those he sent to the

printers. The sometimes-grinding poverty in which he lived, as well as his constant ill health, added to his daily worries; his rigorous method and merciless self-criticism increased the difficulties of many of his undertakings. Moreover, his passion for knowledge remained unaltered over time and always drove him on to fresh study. Nevertheless, his ceaseless labors would have the most extraordinary theoretical consequences for the future.

Of particular value for a reevaluation of Marx’s achievement was the resumed publication in 1998 of the *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA<sup>2</sup>), the historical-critical edition of the complete works of Marx and Friedrich Engels. Twenty-eight more volumes have already appeared (40 were published between 1975 and 1989),<sup>2</sup> and others are in the course of preparation. The MEGA<sup>2</sup> is organized in four sections: (1) all the works, articles, and drafts written by Marx and Engels (with the exception of *Capital*); (2) *Capital* and all its preparatory materials; (3) the correspondence—consisting of 4,000 letters by Marx and Engels and 10,000 written to them by others, a large number published for the first time in the MEGA<sup>2</sup>; and (4) the excerpts, annotations, and marginal notes. This fourth section bears witness to Marx’s truly encyclopedic labors: ever since his time at university, it was his habit

<sup>1</sup> Among the main recent works marking this resurgence of interest, see Musto 2020a.

<sup>2</sup> Tomes II/4.1 and II/4.2 were published before the interruption of MEGA<sup>2</sup>, while Tome II/4.3 came out in 2012. This three-part book brings to 67 the total number of MEGA<sup>2</sup> volumes published since 1975. In the future, some of the further volumes will be published only in digital form.

to compile extracts from the books he read,<sup>3</sup> often interspersing them with reflections that they suggested to him. Marx's literary bequest contains some two hundred notebooks. They are essential for an understanding of the genesis of his theory and of those elements he was unable to develop as he would have wished. The surviving excerpts, covering the long time-span from 1838 to 1882, are written in eight languages (German, ancient Greek, Latin, French, English, Italian, Spanish, and Russian) and refer to the most varied disciplines. They were taken from works of philosophy, art history, religion, politics, law, literature, history, political economy, international relations, technology, mathematics, physiology, geology, mineralogy, agronomy, anthropology, chemistry, and physics—including not only books and newspaper and journal articles but also parliamentary minutes as well as government statistics and reports. This immense store of knowledge, much of it published in recent years or still waiting to be printed, was the construction site for Marx's critical theory, and *MEGA*<sup>2</sup> has enabled access to it for the first time.<sup>4</sup>

These priceless materials—many available only in German and therefore confined to small circles of researchers—show us an author very different from the one that numerous critics, or self-styled disciples, presented for such a long time. Indeed, the new textual acquisitions in *MEGA*<sup>2</sup> make it possible to say that, of the classics of political, economic, and philosophical thought, Marx is the author whose profile has

changed the most in the opening decades of the twenty-first century. The new political setting, following the implosion of the Soviet Union, has also contributed to this fresh perception. For the end of Marxism-Leninism finally freed Marx's work from the shackles of an ideology light years away from his conception of society.

Recent research has refuted the various approaches that reduce Marx's conception of communist society to superior development of the productive forces. For example, it has shown the importance he attached to the ecological question: on repeated occasions, he denounced the fact that expansion of the capitalist mode of production increases not only the theft of workers' labor but also the pillage of natural resources. Marx went deeply into many other issues that, though often underestimated, or even ignored, by scholars of his work, are acquiring crucial importance for the political agenda of our times. Among these are individual freedom in the economic and political sphere, gender emancipation, the critique of nationalism, the emancipatory potential of technology, and forms of collective ownership not controlled by the state. Thus, thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it has become possible to read a Marx very unlike the dogmatic, economistic, and Eurocentric theorist who was paraded around for so long.

## II. New Discoveries on the Genesis of the Materialist Conception of History

In February 1845, after 15 intensive months in Paris that were crucial for his political formation, Marx was forced to move to Brussels, where he was allowed residence on condition that he "did not publish anything on current politics" (Marx 1975b:677). During the three years spent in the Belgian capital, he pressed on fruitfully with his studies of political economy and conceived the idea of writing, along with Engels, Joseph Weydemeyer, and Moses Hess, a "critique of modern German philosophy as expounded by its representatives Ludwig Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer, and Max Stirner, and of German socialism as expounded by its various prophets" (Marx 1976:72). The

<sup>3</sup> Of particular relevance for the content of Marx's library was the publication of *MEGA*<sup>2</sup> vol. IV/32, *Die Bibliotheken von Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels* (Marx and Engels 1999), which consists of an index of 1,450 books (in 2,100 total volumes)—two-thirds of those owned by Marx and Engels. This compilation indicates all the pages of each volume on which Marx and Engels left annotations and marginalia.

<sup>4</sup> For a review of all 13 *MEGA*<sup>2</sup> volumes published from 1998—the year of the resumption of this edition—to 2007, see Musto 2007. In this review essay are discussed the 15 volumes—amounting to a total of 20,508 pages—published between 2008 and 2019.

resulting text, posthumously published under the title *The German Ideology*, had a dual aim: to combat the latest forms of neo-Hegelianism in Germany, and then, as Marx wrote to the publisher Carl Wilhelm Julius Leske on August 1, 1846, “to prepare the public for the viewpoint adopted in my Economy, which is diametrically opposed to German scholarship past and present” (Marx and Engels 1982:50; cf. Musto 2018:57). This manuscript, on which he worked right up to June 1846, was never completed, but it helped him to elaborate more clearly than before, though still not in a definitive form, what Engels defined for the wider public 40 years later as “the materialist conception of history” (Engels 1990a:519).<sup>5</sup>

The first edition of *The German Ideology*, published in 1932, as well as all later versions, which only incorporated slight modifications, were sent to the printers with the semblance of a completed book. In particular, the editors of this actually unfinished manuscript created the false impression that *The German Ideology* included an essential opening chapter on Feuerbach in which Marx and Engels exhaustively set out the laws of “historical materialism” (a term never used by Marx). As stated by Althusser, this was the place where they conceptualized “an unequivocal epistemological break” with their previous writings (Althusser 1996:33). *The German Ideology* soon turned into one of the most important philosophical texts of the twentieth century. According to Henri Lefebvre (1968:71), it set out the “fundamental theses of historical materialism.” Maximilien Rubel (1980:13) held that this “manuscript contains the most elaborate statement of the critical and materialist concept of history.” David McLellan (1975:37) was equally forthright in maintaining that it “contained Marx’s most detailed account of his materialist conception of history.”

<sup>5</sup> In fact, Engels already used this expression in 1859, in his review of Marx’s book *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, but the article had no resonance and the term began to circulate only after the publication of his *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*.

Thanks to Volume I/5 of MEGA<sup>2</sup>, *Deutsche Ideologie: Manuskripte und Drucke (1845–1847)* (Marx and Engels 2017; 1893 pages), many such claims can now be downsized and *The German Ideology* restored to its original incompleteness. This edition—which comprises 17 manuscripts with a total of 700 pages plus a 1200-page critical apparatus providing variations and authorial corrections and indicating the paternity of each section—establishes once and for all the fragmentary character of the text.<sup>6</sup> The twentieth-century fallacy of “scientific communism” and all the instrumentalizations of *The German Ideology* call to mind a phrase to be found in the text itself. For its cogent critique of German philosophy in Marx’s lifetime also sounds an acerbic warning against future exegetical trends: “Not only in its answers, even in its questions there was a mystification” (Marx and Engels 1976:28).

In the same period, the young Trier-born revolutionary extended the studies he had begun in Paris. In 1845, he spent July and August in Manchester delving into the vast English-language economic literature and compiling nine books of extracts (the so-called Manchester Notebooks), mostly from manuals of political economy and books on economic history. The MEGA<sup>2</sup> volume IV/4, *Exzerpte und Notizen Juli bis August 1845* (Marx and Engels 1988), contains the first five of these notebooks, together with three books of Engels’s notes from the same time in Manchester. Volume

<sup>6</sup> A few years before the publication of the MEGA<sup>2</sup> volume I/5, on the basis of the German edition of the Marx/Engels/Weydemeyer *Die Deutsche Ideologie: Artikel, Druckvorlagen, Entwürfe, Reinschriftenfragmente und Notizen zu I. Feuerbach und II Sankt Bruno*, which appeared as a special issue (vol. 2003) of the *Marx-Engels Jahrbuch*, Terrell Carver and David Blank (2014) provided a new English-language edition of the so-called “Chapter on Feuerbach.” The two authors argued for maximum fidelity to the originals, furthermore criticizing the *Marx-Engels Jahrbuch* edition (now incorporated in MEGA<sup>2</sup> vol. I/5) on the grounds that, in line with earlier twenty-century editors, it arranged the discrete manuscripts as if they formed the draft of a fully cohesive, if never completed, work.

IV/5, *Exzerpte und Notizen Juli 1845 bis Dezember 1850* (Marx and Engels 2015; 650 pages), completes this series of texts and makes their previously unpublished parts available to researchers. It includes Notebooks 6, 7, 8, and 9, containing Marx's excerpts from 16 works of political economy. The most sizeable of this group came from John Francis Bray's *Labour's Wrongs and Labour's Remedy* (1839) and four texts by Robert Owen, in particular his *Book of the New Moral World* (1849), all of which evince Marx's great interest at the time in English socialism and his deep respect for Owen, an author whom too many Marxists have over-hastily written off as "utopian." The volume ends with twenty or so pages that Marx wrote between 1846 and 1850, plus some of Engels's study notes from the same period.

These studies of socialist theory and political economy were not a hindrance to Marx's and Engels's habitual political engagement. The 800 pages and more of the recently published Volume I/7, *Werke, Artikel, Entwürfe, Februar bis Oktober 1848* (Marx and Engels 2016; 1294 pages), allow us to appreciate the scale of this in 1848, one of the most consuming years of political and journalistic activity in the lives of the authors of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. After a revolutionary movement of unprecedented scope and intensity plunged the political and social order of continental Europe into crisis, governments in place took all possible countermeasures to put an end to the insurrections. Marx himself suffered the consequences and was expelled from Belgium in March. However, a republic had just been proclaimed in France, and Ferdinand Flocon, a minister in the Provisional Government, invited Marx to return to Paris: "Dear and valiant Marx . . . the tyranny banished you, but free France will reopen its doors to you." Marx naturally set aside his studies of political economy and took up journalistic activity in support of the revolution, helping to chart a recommended political course. After a short period in Paris, in April he moved to the Rhineland and two months later began editing the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, which had meanwhile been founded in Cologne. An intense

campaign in its columns weighed in behind the cause of the insurgents and urged the proletariat to promote "the social and republican revolution" (Marx 1977:178).

Nearly all the articles in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* were published anonymously. One of the merits of the MEGA<sup>2</sup> volume I/7 is to have correctly attributed the authorship of 36 texts to either Marx or Engels, whereas previous collections had left us in doubt about who wrote which piece. Out of a total of 275, a full 125 are printed here for the first time in an edition of the works of Marx and Engels. An appendix also features 16 interesting documents containing accounts of some of their interventions at the meetings of the League of Communists, the aggregates of the Democratic Society of Cologne and the Vienna Union. Those interested in Marx's political and journalistic activity during the "year of the revolution," 1848, will find here much invaluable material to deepen their knowledge.

### III. *Capital*: The Unfinished Critique

The revolutionary movement that rose up throughout Europe in 1848 was defeated within a short space of time, and in 1849, after two expulsion orders from Prussia and France, Marx had no other option than to make his way across the Channel. He would remain in England, an exile and stateless person, for the rest of his life, but European reaction could not have confined him in a better place to write his critique of political economy. At that time, London was the world's leading economic and financial center, the "demiurge of the bourgeois cosmos" (Marx 1978:134), and therefore the most favorable location from which to observe the latest economic developments of capitalist society. He also became a correspondent for the *New-York Tribune*, the newspaper with the largest circulation in the United States of America.

For many years Marx awaited the outbreak of a new crisis, and when this materialized in 1857 he devoted much of his time to analyzing its key features. Volume I/16, *Artikel Oktober 1857 bis Dezember 1858* (Marx and Engels 2018; 1181 pages), includes 84 articles that he published

between autumn 1857 and the end of 1858 in the *New-York Tribune*, including those expressing his first reactions to the financial panic of 1857. The American daily often printed unsigned editorials, but research for this new volume of *MEGA*<sup>2</sup> has made it possible to attribute two more articles to Marx, as well as appending four that were substantially modified by the editors and a further three whose origin remains uncertain.

Driven by a desperate need to improve his economic circumstances, Marx also joined the editorial committee of *The New American Cyclopædia* and agreed to compose a number of entries for this project (*MEGA*<sup>2</sup> volume I/16 contains 39 of these pieces). Although the payment of \$2 per page was very low, it was still an addition to his disastrous finances. Moreover, he entrusted most of the work to Engels, so that he would be able to devote more time to his economic writings.

Marx's work in this period was remarkable and wide-ranging. Alongside his journalistic commitments, from August 1857 to May 1858 he filled the eight notebooks famously known as the *Grundrisse*. But he also set himself the strenuous task of an analytic study of the first world economic crisis. Volume IV/14, *Exzerpte, Zeitungsausschnitte und Notizen zur Weltwirtschaftskrise (Krisenhefte), November 1857 bis Februar 1858* (Marx 2017; 680 pages), decisively adds to our knowledge of one of the most fertile intervals of Marx's theoretical production. In a letter to Engels of December 18, 1857, Marx described his feverish burst of activity:

I am working enormously, as a rule until 4 o'clock in the morning. I am engaged on a twofold task: 1. Elaborating the outlines [*Grundrisse*] of political economy. (For the benefit of the public it is absolutely essential to go into the matter to the bottom, as it is for my own, individually, to get rid of this nightmare.) 2. The present crisis. Apart from the articles for the [*New-York*] *Tribune*, all I do is keep records of it, which, however, takes up a considerable amount of time. I think that, somewhere about the spring, we ought to do

a pamphlet together about the affair as a reminder to the German public that we are still there as always, and always the same. (Marx and Engels 1983:224)

So Marx's plan was to work at the same time on two projects: a theoretical work on the critique of the capitalist mode of production, and a more strictly topical book on the vicissitudes of the ongoing crisis. This is why in the so-called *Notebooks on Crisis*, unlike previous similar volumes, Marx did not compile extracts from the work of other economists but collected a large quantity of news reports on the major bank collapses, on variations in stock market prices, changes in trade patterns, unemployment rates, and industrial output. The particular attention he paid to the latter distinguished his analysis from that of so many others who attributed crises exclusively to the faulty granting of credit and an increase in speculative phenomena. Marx divided his notes among three separate notebooks. In the first and shortest one, entitled "1857 France," he collected data on the state of French trade and the chief measures taken by the Bank of France. The second, the "Book on the Crisis of 1857," was nearly twice as long and dealt mainly with Britain and the money market. Similar themes were treated in the slightly longer third notebook, "Book on the Commercial Crisis," in which Marx annotated data and news items on industrial relations, the production of raw materials, and the labor market.

Marx's work was as rigorous as ever: he copied from more than a dozen journals and newspapers, in chronological order, the most interesting parts of numerous articles and any other information he could use to summarize what was happening. His principal source was *The Economist*—a weekly from which he drew roughly half of his notes—although he also frequently consulted *Morning Star*, *The Manchester Guardian*, and *The Times*. All the extracts were compiled in the English language. In these notebooks, Marx did not confine himself to transcribing the main news reports concerning the United States and Britain. He also tracked the most significant events in other European countries—particularly France, Germany, Austria, Italy,

and Spain—and took a lively interest in other parts of the world, especially India and China, the Far East, Egypt, and even Brazil and Australia.

As the weeks passed, Marx gave up the idea of publishing a book on the crisis and concentrated all his energies on his theoretical work, the critique of political economy, which in his view could brook no further delay. Yet the *Notebooks on Crisis* remain particularly useful in refuting a false idea of Marx's main interests during this period. In a letter of January 16, 1858, to Engels, he wrote that "as regards method" to use for his work "Hegel's *Logic* had been of great use to him" and added that he wanted to highlight its "rational aspect" (Marx and Engels 1983:249). On this basis, some interpreters of Marx's work have concluded that when writing the *Grundrisse* he spent considerable time studying Hegelian philosophy. But the publication of Volume IV/14 makes it quite clear that his main concern at the time was with the empirical analysis of events linked to the great economic crisis that he had been predicting for so long.

Marx's indefatigable efforts to complete his "critique of political economy" are also the main theme of Volume III/12, *Briefwechsel, Januar 1862 bis September 1864* (Marx and Engels 2013; 1529 pages), which contains his correspondence from the beginning of 1862 up to the foundation of the International Working Men's Association. Of the 425 surviving letters, 112 are exchanges between Engels and Marx, while 35 were written to, and 278 received from, third persons (227 of this group being published here for the first time). The inclusion of the latter—the most significant difference from all previous editions—constitutes a veritable treasure trove for the interested reader, providing a wealth of new information about events and theories that Marx and Engels learned from women and men with whom they had a shared political commitment.

Like all the other MEGA<sup>2</sup> volumes of correspondence, this one also ends with a register of letters written by, or addressed to, Marx and Engels that have left no more than traces testifying to their existence. These come to a total of 125, nearly a quarter of the number that have survived, and

include a full 57 written by Marx. In these cases, even the most rigorous researcher can do no more than speculate about various conjectural hypotheses.

Among the key points of discussion in Marx's correspondence from the early 1860s were the American Civil War, the Polish revolt against Russian occupation, and the birth of the Social Democratic Party of Germany inspired by the principles of Ferdinand Lassalle. However, a constantly recurring theme was his struggle to make progress in the writing of *Capital*.

During this period, Marx launched into a new area of research: "Theories of Surplus Value." Over ten notebooks, he minutely dissected the approach of major economists before him, his basic idea being that "all economists share the error of examining surplus-value not as such, in its pure form, but in the particular forms of profit and rent" (Marx 1988:348). Meanwhile, Marx's economic circumstances continued to be desperate. On June 18, 1862, he wrote to Engels: "Every day my wife says she wishes she and the children were safely in their graves, and I really cannot blame her, for the humiliations, torments and alarms that one has to go through in such a situation are indeed indescribable." The situation was so extreme that Jenny made up her mind to sell some books from her husband's personal library—although she could not find anyone who wanted to buy them. Nevertheless, Marx managed to "work hard" and expressed a note of satisfaction to Engels: "strange to say, my grey matter is functioning better in the midst of the surrounding poverty than it has done for years" (Marx and Engels 1985:380). On September 10 of the same year, Marx wrote to Engels that he might get a job "in a railroad office" in the new year (*ibid.*:417). On December 28, he repeated to his friend Ludwig Kugelmann that things had become so desperate that he had "decided to become a 'practical man'"; nothing came of the idea, however. Marx reported with his typical sarcasm: "Luckily—or perhaps I should say unluckily?—I did not get the post because of my bad handwriting" (*ibid.*:436).

Along with the financial stresses, Marx suffered a great deal from health problems.

Nevertheless, from summer 1863 to December 1865 he embarked on further editing of the various parts into which he had decided to subdivide *Capital*. In the end, he managed to draw up the first draft of Volume One; the sole manuscript of Volume Three, in which he gave his only account of the complete process of capitalist production; and an initial version of Volume Two, containing the first general presentation of the circulation process of capital.

Volume II/11 of MEGA<sup>2</sup>, *Manuskripte zum zweiten Buch des "Kapitals," 1868 bis 1881* (Marx and Engels 2008; 1850 pages), contains all the final manuscripts pertaining to Volume Two of *Capital* that Marx drafted between 1868 and 1881. Nine of these ten manuscripts had not been published previously. In October 1867, Marx returned to *Capital*, Volume Two, but various health issues forced another sudden interruption. A few months later, when he was able to resume work, nearly three years had passed since the last version he had written. Marx completed the first two chapters in the course of the spring of 1868, in addition to a group of preparatory manuscripts—on the relationship between surplus value and rate of profit, the law of the rate of profit, and the metamorphoses of capital—which occupied him until the end of the year. The new version of the third chapter was completed in the course of the next two years. Volume II/11 ends with a number of short texts that the aging Marx wrote between February 1877 and the spring of 1881.

The drafts of *Capital*, Volume Two, which were left in anything but a definitive state, present a number of theoretical problems. However, a final version of Volume Two was published by Engels in 1885, and it now appears in Volume II/13 of MEGA<sup>2</sup>, entitled *Karl Marx: Das Kapital: Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie, Zweiter Band. Herausgegeben von Friedrich Engels, Hamburg 1885* (Marx 2008; 800 pages).

Finally, Volume II/4.3, *Ökonomische Manuskripte 1863–1868, Teil 3* (Marx 2012; 1065 pages),<sup>7</sup> completes the second section of

MEGA<sup>2</sup>. This volume, which follows II/4.1 and II/4.2 in the previous series,<sup>8</sup> contains 15 hitherto unpublished manuscripts from autumn 1867 to the end of 1868. Seven of these are draft fragments of *Capital*, Volume Three; they have a highly fragmentary character, and Marx never managed to update them in a way that reflected the progress of his research. Another three relate to Volume Two, while the remaining five tackle issues concerning the interdependence between Volumes Two and Three and include comments on excerpts from the works of Adam Smith and Thomas Malthus. The latter are particularly stimulating for economists interested in Marx's theory of the rate of profit and his ideas on price theory. Philological studies linked to the preparation of this volume have also shown that the original manuscript of *Capital*, Volume One (of which "Chapter Six: Results of the Immediate Process of Production" used to be considered the only surviving part) actually dates back to the 1863–64 period, and that Marx cut and pasted it into the copy he prepared for publication.<sup>9</sup>

With the publication of MEGA<sup>2</sup> volume II/4.3, all the ancillary texts relating to *Capital* have been made available, from the famous "Introduction," written in July 1857 during one of the greatest crashes in the history of capitalism, to the last fragments composed in the spring of 1881. We are talking of 15 volumes plus just as many bulky auxiliary tomes that constitute a formidable critical apparatus for the main text. They include all the manuscripts from the late 1850s and early 1860s, the first version of *Capital* published in 1867 (parts of which would be modified in subsequent editions), the French translation reviewed by Marx that appeared between 1872 and 1875, and all the changes that Engels made to the manuscripts of Volumes Two and Three. Alongside this, the classical box set of the three volumes of *Capital* appears positively minute. It is no

<sup>7</sup> A small part of this text has recently been translated into English as "Marx's Economic Manuscript of 1867–68 (Excerpt)" (Marx 2019).

<sup>8</sup> Volume II/4.2 has recently been translated into English as Fred Moseley (ed.), *Marx's Economic Manuscript of 1864–1865* (2015).

<sup>9</sup> See Carl-Erich Vollgraf, "Einführung," in MEGA<sup>2</sup> vol. II/4.3:421–74 (Marx 2012).

exaggeration to say that only now can we fully understand the merits, limits, and incompleteness of Marx's *magnum opus*.

The editorial work that Engels undertook after his friend's death to prepare the unfinished parts of *Capital* for publication was extremely complex. The various manuscripts, drafts, and fragments of Volumes Two and Three, written between 1864 and 1881, correspond to approximately 2,350 pages of the MEGA<sup>2</sup>. Engels successfully published Volume Two in 1885 and Volume Three in 1894. However, it must be borne in mind that these two volumes emerged from the reconstruction of incomplete texts, often consisting of heterogeneous material. They were written in more than one period in time and thus include different, and sometimes contradictory, versions of Marx's ideas.

#### IV. The International, Marx's Researches Following *Capital*, and Engels's Final Labors

Immediately after the publication of *Capital*, Marx resumed militant activity and made a constant commitment to the work of the International Working Men's Association. This phase in his political biography is documented in Volume I/21, *Werke, Artikel, Entwürfe, September 1867 bis März 1871* (Marx and Engels 2009; 2,432 pages), which contains more than 150 texts and documents for the period from 1867 to 1871, as well as minutes of 169 meetings of the General Council in London (omitted from all previous editions of the works of Marx and Engels<sup>10</sup>) in which Marx made an intervention. As such, it provides research material for crucial years in the life of the International.

Right from the earliest days, in 1864, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's ideas were hegemonic in France, French-speaking

Switzerland, and Belgium, and the mutualists—the name by which his followers were known—were the most moderate wing of the International. Resolutely hostile to state intervention in any field, they opposed socialization of the land and the means of production as well as any use of strikes as a weapon. The texts published in this volume show how Marx played a key role in the long struggle to reduce Proudhon's influence in the International. They include documents related to the preparation of the congresses of Brussels (1868) and Basel (1869), where the International made its first clear pronouncement on the socialization of the means of production by state authorities and in favor of the right to abolish individual ownership of land. This marked an important victory for Marx and the first appearance of socialist principles in the political program of a major workers' organization.

Beyond the International Working Men's Association's political program, the late 1860s and early 1870s were rich in social conflicts. Many workers who took part in protest actions decided to make contact with the International, whose reputation was spreading ever wider, and to ask it to support their struggles. This period also saw the birth of some IWMA sections of Irish workers in England. Marx was worried about the division that violent nationalism had produced within the ranks of the proletariat, and, in a document that has come to be known as the "Confidential Communication," he emphasized that "the English bourgeoisie ha[d] not only exploited the Irish misery to keep down the working class in England by forced immigration of poor Irishmen"; it had also proved able to divide the workers "into two hostile camps" (Marx 1985:120). In his view, "a nation that enslaves another forges its own chains" (*ibid.*), and the class struggle could not evade such a decisive issue. Another major theme in the volume, treated with particular attention in Engels's writings for *The Pall Mall Gazette*, was opposition to the Franco-Prussian war of 1870–71.

Marx's work in the International Working Men's Association lasted from 1864 to 1872, and the brand-new Volume IV/18, *Exzerpte*

<sup>10</sup> Some of them—like the addresses and resolutions presented to the congresses of the International—were instead included in the anthology *Workers Unite! The International 150 Years Later* (Musto 2014), which appeared on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of this organization.

und Notizen, Februar 1864 bis Oktober 1868, November 1869, März, April, Juni 1870, Dezember 1872 (Marx and Engels 2019; 1294 pages) provides the hitherto unknown part of the studies he made during those years. Marx's research took place either close to the printing of Volume One of *Capital* or after 1867 when he was preparing Volumes Two and Three for publication. This MEGA<sup>2</sup> volume consists of five books of excerpts and four notebooks containing summaries of more than one hundred published works, reports of parliamentary debates, and journalistic articles. The most sizeable and theoretically important part of these materials involves Marx's research on agriculture, his main interests here being ground rent, the natural sciences, agrarian conditions in various European countries and the United States, Russia, Japan, and India, and land tenure systems in precapitalist societies.

Marx read attentively *Chemistry in Its Application to Agriculture and Physiology* (1843), a work by the German scientist Justus von Liebig that he considered essential because it allowed him to modify his previous belief that the scientific discoveries of modern agriculture solved the problem of soil replenishment. From then on, he took an ever-keener interest in what we would today call "ecology," particularly soil erosion and deforestation. Among the other books that greatly impressed Marx in this period, a special place should also be assigned to the *Introduction to the Constitutive History of the German Mark, Farm, Village, Town and Public Authority* (1854) by the political theorist and legal historian Georg Ludwig von Maurer. In a letter to Engels on March 25, 1868, he said that he had found Maurer's books "extremely significant," since they approached in an entirely different way "not only the primitive age but also the entire later development of the free imperial cities, of the estate owners possessing immunity, of public authority, and of the struggle between the free peasantry and serfdom" (Marx and Engels 1987:557). Marx further endorsed Maurer's demonstration that private property in land belonged to a precise historical period and could not be regarded as a natural feature of human civilization.

Finally, Marx studied in depth three German works by Karl Fraas: *Climate and the Vegetable World throughout the Ages, a History of Both* (1847), *A History of Agriculture* (1852), and *The Nature of Agriculture* (1857). He found the first of these "very interesting," especially appreciating the part in which Fraas demonstrated that "climate and flora change in historical times." He described the author as "a Darwinist before Darwin," who admitted that "even the species have been developing in historical times." Marx was also struck by Fraas's ecological considerations and his related concern that "cultivation—when it proceeds in natural growth and is not consciously controlled (as a bourgeois he naturally does not reach this point)—leaves deserts behind it." Marx could detect in all this "an unconscious socialist tendency" (Marx and Engels 1987: 558–59).

Following the publication of the so-called *Notebooks on Agriculture*, it can be argued with more evidence than before that ecology might have played a much greater role in Marx's thinking if he had had the energy to complete the last two volumes of *Capital*.<sup>11</sup> Of course, Marx's ecological critique was anticapitalist in its thrust and, beyond the hopes he placed in scientific progress, involved a questioning of the mode of production as a whole.

The scale of Marx's studies in the natural sciences has become fully apparent since the publication of MEGA<sup>2</sup> volume IV/26, *Exzerpte und Notizen zur Geologie, Mineralogie und Agrikulturchemie, März bis September 1878* (Marx 2011; 1104 pages). In the spring and summer of 1878, geology, mineralogy, and agrarian chemistry were more central to Marx's studies than political economy. He compiled extracts from a number of books, including *The Natural History of the Raw Materials of Commerce* (1872) by John Yeats, *The Book of Nature* (1848) by the chemist Friedrich Schoedler, and *Elements of Agricultural Chemistry and Geology* (1856), by the chemist

<sup>11</sup> On these questions, see also the work by Kohei Saito (one of the editors of MEGA<sup>2</sup> volume IV/18), *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism: Capital, Nature and the Unfinished Critique of Political Economy* (2017).

and mineralogist James Johnston. Between June and early September, he was grappling with Joseph Jukes's *Student's Manual of Geology* (1857) (see Marx 2011:139–679), from which he copied down the largest number of extracts. The main focus of these is questions of scientific methodology, the stages of the development of geology as a discipline, and its usefulness for industrial and agricultural production.

Such insights awakened in Marx a need to develop his ideas regarding profit, with which he had last intensively occupied himself in the mid-1860s, when he wrote the draft of the part on "The Transformation of Surplus-Profit into Ground Rent" of *Capital*, Volume Three. Some of the summaries of natural-scientific texts had the aim of throwing greater light on the material he was studying. But other excerpts, more geared to theoretical aspects, were meant to be used in the completion of Volume Three. Engels later recalled that Marx "combed . . . prehistory, agronomy, Russian and American landownership, geology, etc., in particular to work out, to an extent . . . never previously attempted, the section on ground rent in Volume III of *Capital*" (Engels 1990b:341).<sup>12</sup> These volumes of *MEGA*<sup>2</sup> are all the more important because they serve to discredit the myth, repeated in a number of biographies and studies on Marx, that after *Capital* he had satisfied his intellectual curiosity and completely given up new study and research.<sup>13</sup>

Three books of *MEGA*<sup>2</sup> published in the last decade concern the late work by Engels. Volume I/30, *Werke, Artikel, Entwürfe Mai 1883 bis September 1886* (Engels 2011; 1154

pages) contains 43 texts that he wrote in the three years following Marx's death. Of the 29 most important of these, 17 consist of journalistic pieces that appeared in some of the main papers of the European working-class press. For although in this period he was mainly absorbed in editing Marx's incomplete manuscripts of *Capital*, Engels did not neglect to intervene on a series of burning political and theoretical issues. He also brought out a polemical work that took aim at the resurgence of idealism in German academic circles, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*. A further 14 texts, published as an appendix in this *MEGA*<sup>2</sup> volume, are some of Engels's own translations and a series of articles signed by other authors who benefited from his collaboration.

*MEGA*<sup>2</sup> has also published a new set of Engels's correspondence. Volume III/30, *Briefwechsel Oktober 1889 bis November 1890* (Engels 2013; 1512 pages), contains 406 surviving letters from the total of 500 or more that he wrote between October 1889 and November 1890. Moreover, the inclusion for the first time of letters from other correspondents makes it possible to appreciate more deeply the contribution that Engels made to the growth of workers' parties in Germany, France, and Britain, on a range of theoretical and organizational issues. Some of the items in question concern the birth and many ongoing debates in the Second International, whose founding congress took place on July 14, 1889.

Finally, Volume I/32, *Werke, Artikel, Entwürfe März 1891 bis August 1895* (Engels 2010; 1590 pages), brings together the writings from the last four and a half years of Engels's life. There are a number of journalistic pieces for the major socialist papers of the time, including *Die Neue Zeit*, *Le Socialiste*, and *Critica Sociale*, but also prefaces and afterwords to various reprintings of works by Marx and Engels, transcriptions of speeches, interviews and greetings to party congresses, accounts of conversations, documents that Engels drafted in collaboration with others, and a number of translations.

These three volumes will therefore prove highly useful for a deeper study of Engels's

<sup>12</sup> Marx's great interest in the natural sciences, for a long time almost completely unknown, is also evident in *MEGA*<sup>2</sup> volume IV/31, *Naturwissenschaftliche Exzerpte und Notizen, Mitte 1877 bis Anfang 1883* (Marx and Engels 1999), which presented the notes on organic and inorganic chemistry taken by Marx after 1877.

<sup>13</sup> See Marcello Musto, *The Last Years of Karl Marx: An Intellectual Biography* (2020b). An important milestone will be the publication of the volume edited by David Smith, *Marx's World: Global Society and Capital Accumulation in Marx's Late Manuscripts* (forthcoming 2021).

late theoretical and political contributions. The numerous publications and international conferences scheduled for the bicentenary of his birth (1820–2020) will certainly not fail to probe these twelve years following Marx's death, during which he devoted his energies to the diffusion of Marxism.

## V. Another Marx?

What Marx emerges from the new historical-critical edition of his works? In certain respects, he differs from the thinker whom many followers and opponents presented over the years—not to speak of the stone statues to be found in public squares under the unfree regimes of Eastern Europe, which showed him pointing to the future with imperious certainty. On the other hand, it would be misleading to invoke—as do those who over-excitedly hail an “unknown Marx” after each new text appears for the first time—that recent research has turned upside down everything that was already known about him. What MEGA<sup>2</sup> provides, rather, is the textual basis for rethinking a *different* Marx: not different because the class struggle drops out of his thought (as some academics would wish, in a variation of the old refrain of “Marx the economist” against “Marx the politician” that vainly seeks to present him as a toothless classic); but radically different from the author who was dogmatically converted into the *fons et origo* of “actually existing socialism,” supposedly fixated on class conflict alone.

The new advances achieved in Marxian studies suggest that the exegesis of Marx's work is again, as at many other times in the past, likely to become more and more refined. For a long time, many Marxists foregrounded the writings of the young Marx—primarily the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and *The German Ideology*—while the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* remained his most widely read and quoted text. In those early writings, however, one finds many ideas that were superseded in his later work. For a long time, the difficulty of examining Marx's research in the last two decades of his life hampered our knowledge of the important gains he achieved. But it is above all in

*Capital* and its preliminary drafts, as well as in the researches of his final years, that we find the most precious reflections on the critique of bourgeois society. These represent the last, though not the definitive, conclusions at which Marx arrived. If examined critically in the light of changes in the world since his death, they may still prove useful for the task of theorizing, after the failures of the twentieth century, an alternative social-economic model to capitalism.

The MEGA<sup>2</sup> edition has given the lie to all the claims that Marx is a thinker about whom everything has already been written and said. There is still so much to learn from Marx. Today it is possible to do this by studying not only what he wrote in his published works but also the questions and doubts contained in his unfinished manuscripts.

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