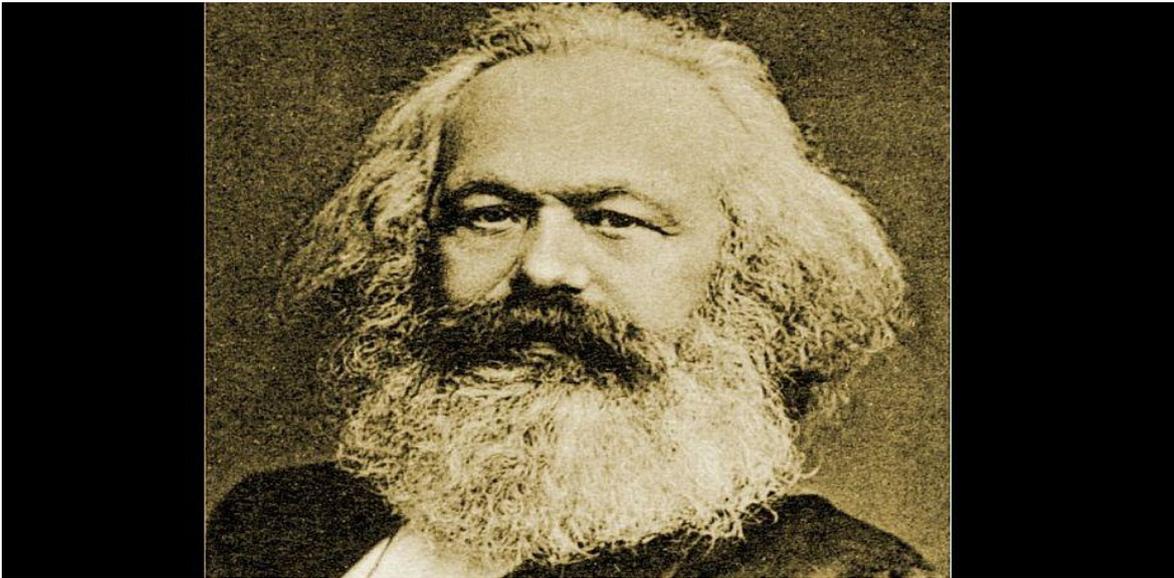


New Profiles of Marx



If an author's eternal youth consists in his capacity to keep stimulating new ideas, then it may be said that Karl Marx has without question remained young in the past 200 years.

Marx left uncompleted in many of his most famous texts. Volume II and III of *Capital* were posthumously edited by Engels, while the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, *The German Ideology* or the *Grundrisse* – all of them non-conceived for publication – appeared almost one century after they were written.

Therefore, the resumed publication of the *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA²), the new historical-critical edition of his complete works, is of particular value for an overall reassessment of Marx's oeuvre. Since 1998, 26 volumes have appeared in print and others are in course of preparation. They contain more faithful versions of certain of Marx's works, all the preparatory drafts of *Capital*, and approximately two hundred notebooks. The latter include excerpts from books that Marx read over the years and the reflections to which they gave rise. They constitute his critical theoretical workshop, indicating the complex itinerary he followed in the development of his thought. These materials show us an author very different from the one that numerous critics or self-styled followers presented for such a long time.

For example, the manuscripts of the so-called "late Marx" reveal an author who extended his examination of the contradictions of capitalist society beyond the conflict between capital and labour to other domains. In fact, in the less known period of his life, Marx devoted a lot of his time to the study of non-European societies and the destructive role of colonialism on the periphery of capitalism. Contrary to interpretations that equate Marx's conception of socialism with the development of productive forces, other notebooks demonstrated that ecological concerns figured prominently in his work.

The MEGA² make it possible to say that, of the biggest authors of political and economic thought, Marx is the one whose profile has changed the most in recent years. Some

manuscripts highlighted that Marx was widely interested in several other topics that people often ignore when they talk about him.

Among them there are the potential of technology, the critique of nationalism, the search for collective forms of ownership not related to state control, and the need for individual freedom in contemporary society: all fundamental issues of our times. Research advances suggest that the renewal in the interpretation of Marx's thought is a phenomenon destined to continue. He is not at all an author about whom everything has already been said or written, despite frequent claims to the contrary. Many sides of Marx remain to be explored.

Finally, the changed political landscape also contributed to Marx's revival. The fall of the Berlin Wall liberated him from the chains of an ideology that had little to do with his conception of society. The implosion of the Soviet Union helped to free Marx from the role of figurehead for a state apparatus. At the same time, to relegate Marx to the position of an embalmed classic suitable only for academia would be a serious mistake, on a par with his transformation into the doctrinal source of 'actually existing socialism' made by many "Marxists".

Returning to Marx is not only still indispensable to understand the logic and dynamics of capitalism. His work is also a very useful tool that provides a rigorous examination addressing why previous socio-economical experiments to replace capitalism with another mode of production failed. Economic crises, profound inequalities that exist in our society – in particular between the Global North and South – and the dramatic environmental issues of our time have urged several scholars and politicians to reopen the debate on the future of capitalism and the need for an alternative.

Many of those who will be reading his books today, once again or for the first time, will observe that many of Marx's analyses are more topical today than they have ever been.