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Karl Marx – Friedrich Engels
Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe (MEGA²), IV Abteilung, Band 12
Exzerpte und Notizen September 1853 bis Januar 1855

2 vols., pp. 1745, € 178, edited by M. Neuhaus e C. Reichel, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 2007

Reviewed by Marcello Musto

Marx and Engels are still without an unabridged and scientific edition of their works, despite the widespread dissemination of their writings. The complete works, the *Marx Engels Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA), were not published until the 1920s, at the initiative of David Borisovič Ryazanov, director of the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow. The Stalinist purges in the Soviet Union, which also affected the scholars working on the project, and the rise of Nazism in Germany, however, put an early end to publication, interrupted in 1935, by which time only 12 of the 42 volumes originally planned, had been printed.

The project of a 'second' MEGA was reborn during the 1960s. Nevertheless, these publications, which began in 1975, were also interrupted, this time following the events of 1989. In 1990, with the goal of continuing this edition, the Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis of Amsterdam and the Karl Marx Haus in Trier formed the Internationale Marx-Engels-Stiftung (IMES). After a difficult phase of reorganization, in the course of which new editorial principles were approved and the publishing house Akademie Verlag took the place of Dietz Verlag, the publication of the so-called MEGA² commenced in 1998.

The complete project, in which scholars of various disciplinary competences from numerous countries participate (from USA to Japan), is articulated in four sections: the first includes all the works, articles, and drafts excluding *Capital*; the second includes *Capital* and its preliminary studies starting from 1857; the third is dedicated to the correspondence; while the fourth includes excerpts, annotations, and marginalia. Of the 114 planned volumes, 53 have already been published (13 since recommencement in 1998), each of which consists of two books: the text plus the critical apparatus, which contains the indices and many additional notes.

Some of the most interesting novelties of the MEGA² are noticeable in the fourth section, *Exzerpte, Notizen, Marginalien*. This contains Marx's numerous summaries and study notes, which constitute a significant testimony to his mammoth work. From his university years, he adopted the life-long habit of compiling notebooks of extracts from the books he read, often breaking them up with the reflections which they prompted him to make. The *Nachlaß* of Marx contains approximately 200 notebooks of summaries. These are essential for the knowledge and comprehension of the genesis of his theory and of the parts of it

that he didn't have the chance to develop as he wished. The conserved extracts, which cover the long span of time from 1838 until 1882, are written in eight languages – German, Ancient Greek, Latin, French, English, Italian, Spanish and Russian – and cover the widest range of disciplines. They were taken from texts of philosophy, art, religion, politics, law, literature, history, political economy, international relations, technology, mathematics, physiology, geology, mineralogy, agronomy, ethnology, chemistry, and physics, as well as articles from newspapers and journals, parliamentary reports, statistics, reports, and publications of government offices – as amongst these are the famous 'Blue Books', in particular the *Reports of the inspectors of factories*, which contained investigations of great importance for his studies. This immense mine of knowledge, largely still unpublished, was the building site of Marx's critical theory. The fourth section of MEGA², planned for 32 volumes, provide access to it for the first time.

The last volume published is exemplary of this. It contains nine extensive notebooks of extracts (totalling almost 1000 printed pages), compiled by Marx essentially during 1854. These notes were written in the same period in which he published two important series of articles in the *New-York Tribune*. The first, entitled *Lord Palmerston*, was dedicated to a critique of the policies of the British Prime Minister of the time. The second, however, known as *Revolutionary Spain*, was a report of the Spanish uprisings, considered by Marx to be the most important revolutionary rising in Europe following the revolutions of 1848-49, which led to the so-called 'Two-year progressionist period' (1854-56).

The four notebooks used for *Lord Palmerston* contain annotations on the history of diplomacy taken, principally, from texts by the historians Famin and Francis, of the lawyer and German diplomat von Martens, by the Tory politician Urquhart, as well as from 'Correspondence relative to the affairs of the Levant' and 'Hansard's parliamentary debates'. The other five, taken from Chateaubriand, from the Spanish writer de Jovellanos, from the Spanish general San Miguel, from his fellow countryman de Marliani and many other authors are, instead, exclusively dedicated to Spain and demonstrate the intensity with which Marx examined its social and political history and culture. Furthermore, the notes from *Essai sur l'histoire de la formation et des progrès du Tiers État* of Augustin Thierry arouse particular interest. All these notes are of very important because they reveal the sources Marx drew upon and allow us to understand the way in which he utilized these readings for the writing of his articles. The volume finally contains a series of extracts on military history by Engels.

To be able to know some of his readings constitutes a precious resource for the reconstruction of his research. It also helps to refute the false hagiographical Marxist-Leninist interpretation that has often represented his thought as the fruit of a bolt from the blue and not, as it was in reality, as an elaboration full of theoretical elements derived from predecessors and contemporaries.

After 1989, Marx was too hastily put aside. Contrary to those who predicted his definitive fall into oblivion, in the last few years Marx has returned to the attention

of international scholars for his continuing ability to explain capitalist society. Freed from the oppressing shackles of the Soviet Union, his work can now be re-read and re-interpreted through the invaluable unpublished material being printed in MEGA^2.