

BOOK REVIEW

Marx, Karl [und] Friedrich Engels. Gesamtausgabe (MEGA), Erste Abteilung, Band 4, Werke – Artikel -Entwürfe Ende August 1844 bis April 1846. Bearb. von Regina Roth und Christine Weckwerth. De Gruyter Akademie Forschung, Berlin [etc.] 2023. 1640 pp. € 189.95. (E-book: € 189.95.)

More than two thirds of this volume comprises writings by Friedrich Engels. The bulk is accounted for by his first major book, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, plus the many articles he wrote for English and German socialist journals and newspapers. However, in keeping with the chronology of publications, the volume opens with the first book that Marx and Engels wrote together, *Die Heilige Familie* (The Holy Family), a harsh polemical attack on their former friend and ally Bruno Bauer and his followers, the philosophers who called themselves the “true socialists”. Although Marx wrote the majority of the text, Engels contributed most of the opening chapter for what was originally meant to become a small brochure but which, in Marx’s hands, grew into a book of over 300 pages. However, Engels’s influence runs through the extensive passages authored by Marx. Whenever Marx addressed socialist writers from other countries, and, in particular, political economists, he drew heavily on Engels’s thought. Although he had interrupted his studies of political economy to write the polemic against Bauer and others, he did not lose sight of his and Engels’s great project. In a programmatic statement in chapter IV of *The Holy Family*, he declared that while Proudhon’s critique remained within the bounds of political economy, it nonetheless cleared the way for a *radical* critique of political economy and its presuppositions, thus making possible a real science of political economy for the first time. In another lengthy passage, he claimed, rather boldly given the stage of his studies, that the contradictions inherent in a modern society founded on private property would inevitably lead to a dissolution of private property in all its forms. This is the only trace of his first long manuscript on political economy – the *Paris Manuscripts of the summer of 1844* – that was published during his lifetime.

Engels’s book *The Condition of the Working Class in England* is the second major text in this volume. This book, of some 400 pages, written in just a few months from November 1844 to March 1845 and published soon after in May 1845 (by the editor Otto Wiegand in Leipzig), earned its young author recognition as one of Germany’s leading writers on social issues. Even today, it is regarded as a classic of the social sciences, especially among social historians and scholars of the history of nineteenth-century urban development. For Engels, the book was just the first part of a larger, unfinished project: a comprehensive social history of England. Engels’s book has been harshly criticized by industrial historians of England during the epoch of the first Industrial Revolution, especially concerning its statistical data and occasional careless

or unattributed citations. Such criticisms notwithstanding, the book was well received in Germany. Marx held the book in high esteem and quoted from it several times in *Capital, Volume I*. However, and in sharp contrast to Marx's testimony, the close relationship between Engels's book and his critique of political economy has often been overlooked. Commonly perceived as a work of descriptive social criticism, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* is, in fact, much more than that. In several passages, especially in the long chapter on "Competition" (a core category of classical political economy), Engels continued to expand the critique of political economy that he had already outlined in his first and highly original sketch on this topic, the long article "Umriss zu einer Kritik der Nationalökonomie", written between late 1843 and January 1844, and published in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* in 1844. Of course, the young Engels was not the first to become aware of the sharp opposition between political economy and modern socialism. However, he was the first to argue for a systematic and comprehensive critique not only of the prevailing doctrines but of all the categories of modern economic thought, pleading for a project that would go beyond the existing socialist criticism (the work of the later "Ricardian Socialists"). While *The Condition of the Working Class in England* contains many harsh moral accusations against and condemnations of the emerging industrial society, Engels also advanced the analysis and critique set out in his earlier programmatic article. In one of the core chapters, on "Competition", he pursued his analysis of the capital-labour relationship further, scrutinizing the peculiar form of "freedom" enjoyed by modern wage workers – partly a feigned freedom, yet also more than that – the ability to choose and change their masters and their occupations granted wage workers "some real freedom" compared with the old regime of outright slavery. In analysing how average wage levels were determined, Engels was arguably the first to grasp the peculiar "double freedom" characterizing the situation of the modern wage worker in his relationship with the class of his employers. Engels's early critique of the effects on labourers of the increasing use of machinery within the new factory system is equally noteworthy. Taking issue with the prevailing view among political economists, he emphasized the highly contradictory consequences of factory work, which, at first glance, reduced the physical exertion of labour but, in reality, increased the nervous stress and exhaustion of factory workers by extending working hours and raising levels of work intensity. As his description and analysis of the living conditions of factory workers in Manchester, the first "industrial city" of the modern era, clearly shows, despite ever-rising levels of labour productivity, everyday life for factory workers did not improve; it actually worsened for most of them.

Engels intended to extend his critique of social conditions in England and the industrial regions on the Continent, as shown in his article on additional remarks on the condition of the working class in England, published in January 1846, and the text for the brochure announcing a new journal, *Gesellschaftsspiegel*, which Engels co-wrote with Moses Hess. The programme outlined in this text – published in this volume for the first time – saw all the major topics that Engels had dealt with in his book – from the big cities, the industrial districts, to the condition of the working class – extended to include investigations into the condition of the propertied classes. It is clear that he planned to continue his examination of these topics in the industrial districts of Germany.

Engels's articles and speeches of this period are of particular interest. The two public lectures he gave in his home region of Wuppertal, later published as journal articles in *Elberfelder Reden*, demonstrated his outstanding talent for presenting complex arguments to a broad, non-academic audience. It is from this source that Marx drew the much-praised description of the new global economy of industrial capitalism when hurriedly drafting the opening chapters of *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* in the early months of 1848. Even before that, he had relied on Engels's account of the new global economy and the dominant role of the British factory industry in world trade.

There are some novelties in this volume. In particular, Marx's fragmentary manuscript on Friedrich List's *The National System of Political Economy*. First published in 1841, List's book mounted a strong argument against the cosmopolitan political economy of the English classics, and his plea for a "national" conception of political economy, as opposed to the free trade policies propagated by the English economists, gained much support in Germany. The term "Nationalökonomie", coined by List, became firmly established among German-speaking economists. List's refutation of free trade policy and his plea for a protective tariff policy for Germany and other countries seeking to catch up with the industrial development in Great Britain became widely accepted.

Marx and Engels were highly critical of free trade as well as of protective tariffs. They both intended to attack List and joined forces for another project, a thorough critique of List's book. That would have been their first joint pamphlet devoted to a critique of political economy. Apparently, Engels did not contribute a sketch of his own for this project. However, it is obvious from the published texts that he had already made up his mind about the main points of his critique of List's ideas about free trade and its counterpart. One finds the outline of this critique in the lectures he delivered at Elberfeld in early 1845. In his second speech, he posed the question of how the world market, still in the making and, for the time being, dominated by British industrial production, would react to a protectionist policy in Germany based upon high tariffs on British imports. According to Engels, the very logic of industrial development would render any policy of protective tariffs unsustainable in the longer run. German industrialists would be able to create an industry of their own, but the expansion and flourishing of their industry would sooner or later force them into the open again in order to gain access to world markets. Ultimately, German industry would be exposed to even stronger competition from British industrialists.

Marx probably wrote his draft critique of List's book between August and October 1845. Only parts of it have survived. The fragments were rediscovered in 1970 and published twice in 1971. Today, thanks to the meticulous work of the editors of this volume, we know more about the original text. Less than half of it, forty-four pages, have been preserved, while fifty-eight pages are missing. The beginning and the conclusion of Marx's draft are absent, and several pages in between. Regarding its core arguments, the text can be regarded as an important intermediary between Marx's initial engagement with political economy in *The Economic Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844, and the new project he started together with Engels at the end of October 1845 (the manuscripts known as the *German Ideology*). As the fragment shows, Marx had not yet fully emancipated himself from a moral philosophical style of thinking: he

still criticizes the commodification of human beings (and of everything) as somehow “inhuman”. But focusing on List’s key theoretical statements, Marx provided a crystal-clear critique in the style of a proper economist. List and his followers proclaim that the universal laws ruling modern society – universal competition, universal exchange, universal exploitation, all according to the law of exchange value – should apply only inside each country or society, but not to the world market. To avoid being exploited by British industrialists, the German bourgeoisie wanted to escape the universal economic laws in international trade by artificial means. This could not work and would eventually ruin not only the industrialists, but also the agrarian capitalists and the landowners dependent on agrarian exports.

Engels’s concern with international trade is clearly documented in another text from this period, republished here, which is his translation and edition of a fragment by Charles Fourier on trade. Engels admired Fourier’s witty and often sarcastic critique of contemporary bourgeois societies. In his introduction, he emphasized the need for German socialists and communists to focus on systematic social criticism as their main task.

Another text by Marx rediscovered only a few years ago and that stirred a lot of excitement is his short journal article on a text by Peuchet on suicide, written in November/December 1845 and published in the *Gesellschaftsspiegel* in January 1846. It is republished in this volume. This is, of course, not a treatise about suicide by Marx. The text could by no means be compared to a systematic study of the phenomenon of suicide, such as Emile Durkheim’s famous book *Le Suicide: Étude de sociologie* of 1897 or Tomás Garrigue Masaryk’s *Der Selbstmord als sociale Massenerscheinung der Modernen Civilisation* of 1881, although some Marxi enthusiasts suggested otherwise in the 1990s. As the editors show, Marx used Peuchet’s text, which he translated and edited, quite selectively and only to highlight the embarrassing fact that suicide seemed to be a “natural” consequence of the current state of society. Suicide, especially among young people, could only be avoided by a radical reform of the way society was organized – a phrase that Marx puts into Peuchet’s mouth – while omitting the hints at possible personal circumstances or reasons for suicides that Peuchet described.

Another highlight of this volume is the contract for the publication of a two-volume work by Marx, titled “Kritik der Politik und Nationalökonomie”, concluded between Marx and the editor Friedrich Leske in February 1845. Previously, it had been published only in notes without any further explanation. It is published here in its entirety.

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