

Marx, Engels, and Marxisms

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Reexamining Engels's
Legacy in the 21st
Century

palgrave
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ISSN 2524-7123

ISSN 2524-7131 (electronic)

Marx, Engels, and Marxisms

ISBN 978-3-030-55210-7

ISBN 978-3-030-55211-4 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-55211-4>

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Cover credit: Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels Papers - The German Ideology, International Institute of Social History (Amsterdam).

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

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PREFACE

It's been 200 years since the birth of Friedrich Engels, the closest and life-long comrade of Karl Marx as well as the founder of Marxism. Inevitably, throughout the course of history, the evaluation of Engels has wavered and changed dramatically. Today we are in a position to examine the true legacy of Engels's theory beyond the sterile opposition between traditional Marxism and Western Marxism.

It is certain that Engels's achievements in the history of Marxism are—with the exception of Marx himself—incomparably high. As Terrell Carver points out, it was not Marx's *Capital* but Engels's *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* that was most read among books on Marxism.¹ Furthermore, the leaders of the Second International, as well as those who led the first successful Marxist seizure of state power in the Russian Revolution, were heavily influenced by Engels's views on history, the state and revolution. What these traditional Marxists thought of as Marxism was actually Marx's theory heavily influenced by the late Engels.

Engels edited Marx's economic manuscripts and published them as Volume II and III of *Capital*. He also edited and republished various books, pamphlets, and articles by Marx after his death. In doing so, he added new prefaces and introductions, sometimes even emending and modifying original texts written by Marx. Thus, it is no coincidence that

¹Terrell Carver, *Marx and Engels: The Intellectual Relationship* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1983), 119.

the popularity of Engels's *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, as well as his systematic intervention in Marx's writings, determined the course of Marxism in the twentieth century.

The reason for Engels's success is largely owing to the simplification of Marx's theory in addition to his sharp analysis of concrete social and political events. Engels clearly recognized that the extensive scope of Marx's project goes far beyond any short-sighted view of the interests of workers' and socialist movements, which made the wide reception of Marx's theory among workers difficult. The essence of Engels's theoretical endeavor is thus not a simple deformation of Marx's theory, but rather the reconstruction of its key elements in a way that was adjustable to and compatible with socialist and workers' movements at the time.

With hindsight, one can say that the conditions for a post-capitalist society such as Marx anticipated did not exist in the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. In the absence of the conditions for socialism Engels did his best to formulate an ideology to counter the capitalist ideology of the modernization but *within* the modern social system of nation-states. In this attempt, he overemphasized certain aspects of Marx's theory such as rationalism, positivism, progressive view of history, productivism, and Eurocentrism. However, precisely because of this strategy, Engels's attempt turned out to be quite successful. As Michael Heinrich points out, Marxism provided "a comprehensive intellectual orientation" for the working class.² Without Engels's re-assembling of Marx's theory, the enormous success of Marxism in the twentieth century would have been impossible.

Nevertheless, insofar as the secret of Engels's success was based on his uncritical appraisal of the modernization process, Marxism was not able to provide a theoretical scope that truly goes beyond modern capitalist society. As Immanuel Wallerstein has pointed out,³ Marxism in the centers of the capitalist world-system has turned into social democracy, demanding reforms of capitalist economy under representative democracy. In the semi-peripheries and peripheries where socialist revolutions were successful, as Wallerstein says, Marxism has only functioned as an ideology that legitimizes industrialization and modernization under

²Michael Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012), 24.

³See Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Decline of American Power: The U.S. in a Chaotic World* (New York: The New Press, 2003).

“state capitalism,” an undemocratic political form. Ultimately, “actually existing socialist countries” remained trapped within the global system of sovereign states.⁴

In this vein, Engels’s theoretical intervention came to be regarded as the reason for the political dogmatization of “Marxism.” As a result, he was severely accused of the “deformation” of Marx’s own theory. As discussed in this volume, Georg Lukács and Karl Korsch criticized Engels already in the 1920s, and Engels’s “scienticism” was also criticized from the “humanist” standpoint of the young Marx in the 1960s.

Furthermore, because the new complete works of Marx and Engels (*Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*) provides easier access to Marx’s own manuscripts and notebooks, a series of works has emerged which investigate the intellectual relationship between Marx and Engels more critically.⁵ However, there are also Marxist scholars who point to the one-sided character of the criticisms raised by Post-Marxism. John Bellamy Foster and Paul Burkett, for example, explore the rich theoretical possibilities of Engels’s dialectical investigations of nature in terms of contemporary ecological thinking.⁶

In any case, (re)reading Engels today is somewhat different from doing so in the past. At the early stage of Marxism, Engels was uncritically identified with Marx’s own theory, which made traditional Marxism very dogmatic. In the course of the twentieth century, various critical attempts to distance Engels’s theory from traditional Marxism emerged. However, in the twenty-first century, after the demise of actually existing socialism, as well as the decay of Marxist social and political movements, it is possible to examine the legacy of Engels’s analysis of capitalism more soberly.

For example, Wolfgang Streek, in his recent article in *New Left Review*, has reinterpreted Engels’s interest in military issues historically, attempting to formulate a new theoretical foundation for the analysis of warfare and

⁴ See Paresh Chattopadhyay, *The Marxian Concept of Capital and the Soviet Experience: Essay in the Critique of Political Economy* (Westport: Praeger, 1994).

⁵ Kohei Saito, “Marx and Engels: The Intellectual Relationship Revisited from an Ecological Perspective,” in *Marx’s Capital After 150 Years: Critique and Alternative to Capitalism*, ed. Marcello Musto (London: Routledge, 2019).

⁶ John Bellamy Foster and Paul Burkett, *Marx and the Earth: An Anti-critique* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

the inter-state-system in the twentieth century.⁷ In addition, Paul Blackledge, in his article published in *Monthly Review*, points out how the young Engels, independently of Marx, formulated some key theses of Marxism. In fact, Engels's *Condition of the Working Class in England* remains quite useful for analyzing the contemporary capitalist system, because his sharp and pioneering insights continue to astonish today's readers.⁸

Like Streek and Blackledge, the contributors to this volume aim at new theoretical interventions and reevaluation of Engels's legacy on the bicentenary occasion of his birth. In this way, the volume attempts to critically reexamine the merits and limits of Engels's theory in the twenty-first century. The book consists of four parts.

In Part I, Regina Roth and Ryuji Sasaki discuss the issue of class in Engels's theory. In Chapter 1 Roth explores the sources which Engels used for his well-known analysis of the *Condition of the Working Class in England*, focusing on the role of technology. She evaluates Engels's claims from today's standpoint, discussing their validity and limits. In Chapter 2 Sasaki rethinks Engels's theory of class struggle, focusing on his *The Peasant War in Germany* written in 1850.

In Part II, Engels's philosophy will be critically analyzed, particularly in relation to epistemology and ontology in German Idealism. In Chapter 3 Tom Rockmore critically investigates whether Engels's reflection theory of knowledge, as well as any form of materialism on which he relies, could overcome the traditional philosophical problem of knowledge. In Chapter 4 Kaan Kangal examines Engels's dialectics in the *Dialectics of Nature* and shows that, unlike Hegel, his dialectic is intended to work *against* metaphysics.

Part III discusses Engels's theory of crisis as well as post-capitalism. In Chapter 5 Timm Graßmann reconstructs Engels's theory of crisis. According to Graßmann, not only Engels's insider and commercial knowledge, but also his numerous observations and analyses, inspired and shaped Marx's view. Engels made a major contribution to the analysis of both the empirical workings and the spirit of capitalism. In Chapter 6 Kohei Saito revisits the problem of the intellectual relationship between

⁷Wolfgang Streek, "Engels's Second Theory," *New Left Review* 123 (June/July 2020).

⁸Paul Blackledge, "Engels vs. Marx?: Two Hundred Years of Frederick Engels," *Monthly Review* 72, no. 1 (May 2020).

Marx and Engels. Here Saito uses Georg Lukács's theory of metabolism that was developed in the *Ontology of Social Being* in order to show that Engels's conception of labor plays a key role in Lukács's theory of crisis. In Chapter 7 Seongjin Jeong explores Engels's vision of socialism. Contrary to conservative or anarchist accusations, Jeong shows that Engels belongs to the tradition of socialism from below, that is, democratic socialism, along with Marx, envisioning post-capitalism as the free and full development of "association."

Part IV "Engels at the Margins" deals with new fields opened up within Engels's theory, such as gender, ecology, colonialism, and anthropology. In Chapter 8 Camilla Royle argues that an ecological sensibility is evident throughout Engels's work, especially his writings on urban life. According to Royle, Engels's sharp criticism of proposed solutions to the problem of poor housing, that were based on the acquisition of commodities, is relevant to debates over environmental strategy today. In Chapter 9 Heather Brown assesses the legacy of Engelsian feminism, both positive and negative, and suggests future areas of study that will contribute, from a Marxist perspective, to the important discussion of intersectional relationships between class and gender.

In Chapter 10 Soichiro Sumida argues that Engels was ahead of Marx in research on political economy and on Ireland. Their correspondence from the 1850s and 1860s also shows that Marx's fully fledged Irish studies relied heavily on Engels's findings. Nevertheless, Sumida concludes that Marx's theory of capitalist colonialism is clearly different from the late Engels's view on Ireland. In Chapter 11 Thomas C. Patterson explores the legacy of Engels's contributions to contemporary anthropological inquiry. Patterson examines selected works by Engels in chronological order—*The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845), *The Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man* (1876), and *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884).

In an Afterword, Terrell Carver reflects upon all the contributions by asking "What is Friedrich Engels?" The question remains an open one because different approaches to Engels in different historical conjunctures always produce new answers, and not always in relation to Marx.

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Acknowledgments The research was supported by JSPS Kakenhi Grant Number JP20K13466 as well as by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2018S1A3A2075204).

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