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**Marx's Social and Political Thought
after the *MECW* and *MEGA*²**

A thesis

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ARCHER BUISSINK



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Abstract

Recent decades have seen significant advancements in the accessibility of Marx and Engels' social and political thought due to publication of most of their writings, published or otherwise. The *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, which contains their published works, some economic manuscripts and important drafts, and letters translated into English, was completed in 2004; and the more extensive *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe* (Complete Edition) is nearing completion. In parallel, the removal of Soviet editorial influence over the publication and interpretation of these collections has facilitated new interpretations and challenges to old dogmas surrounding the thought of Marx and Engels. However, this process has been questioned for a total depoliticisation which overemphasises an amorphous 'thought' and abandons the political, activist nature of their work. This thesis uses recently available and partially untranslated material published within the *Collected Works* and the *Gesamtausgabe* to present three vignettes of Marx's social thought: the development of the proletariat as their focus in the 1840s; solidarity with Poland and the international relations of the workers' movement; and the theory of the machine system, applied to contemporary platform capitalism. While these confirm the contradictory nature of Marx's social thought across different writings, recognition of the political nature of Marx's analysis means this contradiction can be contextualised through the fluid political situation which Marx and Engels sought to interpret and change. Thus, a less dogmatic and more nuanced picture of Marx can emerge from the *MECW* and *MEGA2*, yet this must still be seen as a political, activist Marx.

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Introduction

A Return to Marx in the 21st Century

In the wake of the Global Financial Crisis in 2008, the crashing financial markets lead to a somewhat unexpected rise – Karl Marx returned to prominence as a political economist and philosopher only fifteen years after the democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe and the rise of post-Marxism led many across the political spectrum to proclaim him irrelevant or belonging to a bygone era (Laclau and Mouffe 1987; Kumar 1992; Fuller 1992; Therborn 2008). Of course, remaining Marxist scholars and activists sought to return to Marx to explain the financial turbulence (Tabb 2010; Shaikh 2011; Ticktin, 2013), yet we have also seen renewed interest from outside the ‘old faithful’. This phenomenon is not exclusive to the West, although the different social and political histories of countries such as China lead this return to take different forms (Ping 2007) than the liberal capitalist West. The rise of the ‘socialist wind’ (Xuan and Tan 2017) with politicians such as Bernie Sanders and European left populist parties such as *La France insoumise* (Marlière 2019) and Slovenia’s *Levica* (Toplišek 2019) prompt further interest – within and without their ranks – in Karl Marx.

The fundamental question that rises with resurgent interest in the political thought of Karl Marx is the ends to which it is used and the contemporary social questions for which Marx is seen to be of interest. At first glance, the reason for this relevance of Marx is clear. After all, Marxism as ‘scientific socialism’ (Thomas 2008) is inherently relevant to the Left. Over 100 years ago, Lenin (1964, 50) wrote that ‘the remarkable consistency and integrity of Marx’s views, whose totality constitutes modern materialism and modern scientific socialism, [is] the theory and programme of the working-class movement in all civilised countries’. This view was broadly shared

among the classical revolutionary Marxists, and as long as Marxists themselves still exist, exists to this day on the radical fridges of the political Left.

Since Lenin wrote those remarks in 1914, however, Marx(ism) and the working-class movement have been parting ways. This began, infamously, with the ‘deradicalisation’ of European Social Democracy during Lenin’s time, when Social Democratic parties began to combine “revolutionism in theory and reformism in practice’ (Tucker 1967, 350) and parted ways from the revolutionaries within their ranks. As the 20th century progressed, both sides of the schism in Social Democracy found themselves taking similar routes at different periods. In 1959 the German Social-Democratic Party formalised a reorientation from a ‘class party’ to a ‘people’s party’ and further broke from their revolutionary history (Müller 1984; Fertikh 2011). Only a few decades later, the ‘revolutionary wing’ of the workers’ movement found themselves in similar positions, often either choosing to totally redefine themselves on the centre-left, as occurred in Italy (Belloni 1992; Bull 2007); adopt a less revolutionary yet still radical position within mainstream politics like the French Communists since Robert Hue (Bell 2006; Wand and Keith 2020); or preserve their theoretical orthodoxy at the cost of any political relevance.

While some exceptions to this can be seen, such as the rise of the post-Maoist Workers’ Party of Belgium in the Wallonia region of Belgium (Rihoux et al. 2019), the hegemonic position which Marx appeared to hold over the workers’ movement in the early 1910s has long since been broken. This political shift has, of course, led to significant shifts in the political orientation and goals of the Left in parliaments and cabinet rooms. It also led to a significant shift in how Marx is read with the organised system of Social Democratic party schools, party intellectuals, and party publishers being replaced with a much more individualised, academic system.

As the influence of Marx upon the workers’ movement declined, the relationship between reading Marx and mass socialist politics naturally declined. This was matched with the rise of Western Marxism, which was often explicit in having less ties, and less of an obligation, to organised politics and the workers’ movement. Anderson (1976, 33)

notes the impact of the exile of the Institute of Social Research from Frankfurt abroad during the 1930s, which ‘transferred it into a political environment devoid of a mass working-class movement even formally committed to socialism, or of any substantial Marxist tradition’. In this context Marx increasingly became a theoretical lens for an increasingly academic social sciences.

As an editorial for the journal *Critical Sociology* commented, Marx “helps us understand the development of capitalism, the way it will change, and the resulting relationships that emerge globally’ (Fasenfest 2018, 855). Indeed, in recent decades, scholars have sought inspiration from Marx – even if they do not fully identify with Marxism – including in a variety of novel areas such as ecology (Clark & Foster 2010; Saito 2023), feminism (Fraser 2013; Bhattacharya 2017) and LGBT rights (Drucker 2011; Arruzza 2015; Vance 2018). While Marxism has declined considerably as a political movement, *marxisant* social science occupies a comfortable niche in a variety of disciplines.

These changes in how scholars have utilised Marx have been supported by changes in how we read Marx. In the 1970s, researchers from the Institutes of Marxism-Leninism and universities in the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic launched the *Marx Engels Gesamtausgabe* (Complete Edition, *MEGA*²) aiming to finally publish Marx’s entire *oeuvre*, including drafts, letters, and notes (Golman and Sperl 1976). After the democratic changes in Eastern Europe, work on the *MEGA*² continued, albeit with a depoliticised editorial stance led by international academics (Rojan 1992; 2001). Now nearing completion, the *MEGA*² has been praised for its thorough and undogmatic nature (Wendling 2005; Musto 2010) and its ability to provide new insights into how Marx’s thought development – and where his ideas sometimes are in tension with each other (Musto 2020). Now separated from the need to produce a ‘party line’, Marx appears a much more complex, and perhaps more interesting, historical scholar.

Yet the *MEGA*² has also drawn criticism for this editorial policy. Carver (2017, 11), for example, criticises an apolitical approach that presents Marx ‘as a “thinker’

delivering items of ‘thought’’. He argues that this obfuscates the ‘everyday Marx’ and ‘productive ways to think about politics, activism and struggle’. This thesis seeks to partially address this criticism of recent Marx scholarship by providing three vignette essays discussing aspects of Marx’s approach to political and social thought with a focus on the ‘everyday’.

Of course, interpreting Marx in a way which can satisfy this criteria is not a challenge which began with the *MEGA*² or post-Soviet editorial reforms. In an essay within *la Pensée* titled ‘On the Young Marx’, Althusser (1961, 3) notes that the problem posed by interpreting Marx’s writings is threefold – it is equally a political, a theoretical, and a historical problem. Marx’s development, or ‘escape from his beginnings’ in Althusser’s framing (25), provokes questions about what is considered to be Marxism, in contrast to an un- or pre-Marxist Marx; where and when demarcations ought to be made in his thought; and how, when looking to present Marx historically, approach ‘what he is going to discover in the very way he must forget’ (26). The shift from an organised, political reading of Marx affiliated with a particular branch of Marxist ideology relieves the pressure of the first challenge to a considerable extent. After all, if one does not approach Marx to justify a Marxism, one does not need Marx himself to approach a codified Marxism. Questions around interpreting Marx’s theoretical and political development are unavoidable however, as its presentation and analysis inevitably has to identify periods of rupture.

Therefore, for these essays it is the second two ‘problems’ which make Marx particularly interesting for contemporary scholarship. Greater access to the entirety of Marx’s writings allows for new links and disconnections to be made across the various periods and political contexts he and Engels inhabited. Following this, the first two essays revisit Marx and Engels’ political thought and activity during their own lifetime. Two key dimensions are individually focused on: the role of the proletariat in their theoretical development throughout the 1840s, and their conceptions of international relations and international solidarity with a focus on the Polish question from the 1840s until Engels’ passing in the 1890s. These two dimensions were chosen both for their significance to historical prolonged debates within Marxology, and the potential to

further contextualise Marx and Engels as political figures in their own time through deep study of their texts, including letters, drafts, and other writings from within the *MEGA*².

The third essay takes a different approach, discussing Marx's theory of the machine system from *Capital* (1867) and economic manuscripts, and how it can be adapted to the contemporary sociology of the platform economy to interpret algorithms. Rather than allow us to further understand Marx and Engels themselves, this essay highlights how Marxist sociology can draw upon recent Marxological scholarship. As discussed above, this is an important dynamic for the continued vitality of Marx in the social sciences. After all, it is these contemporary applications that make the case for further research into Marx's social and political thought outside of a mere historical curiosity.

Chapter One

The Proletariat in Marx & Engels' Critique of Capitalism 1842-1848¹

In a letter to Karl Marx dated October 1844, Friedrich Engels (1982d, 5) lamented to the man who would become his lifelong intellectual and political companion that the German proletariat could achieve their emancipation through communism, '[i]f only one could show these fellows the way! But that's impossible.' At the time neither man would have known the significance that communism, and efforts to 'show the way' would have on their lives. By the time the two men were forced to end their partnership at the hand of fate, Engels (1989a, 468) would note that '[Marx's] real mission in life was to contribute, in one way or another... to the liberation of the modern proletariat, which he was the first to make conscious of its own position and its needs, conscious of the conditions of its emancipation'. The letter from Engels above highlights how complex this process could be, with the search for solutions to both philosophical and political questions of the day intertwined in their eyes. The process was, unlike what hagiographers would later suggest, one of deep uncertainty and, at times, pessimism towards the whole endeavour.

The period this chapter focuses on, the six years from 1842 until 1848, when Europe was in the throes of revolution, is significant for Marxist sociology for both intellectual and political reasons. It traverses Marx's first discussions of class society in 1842 and philosophical identification both with the revolutionary proletariat in 1843

¹ An earlier version of this chapter was published in *Science and Society* 87(1) in January 2023. It can be viewed at <https://doi.org/10.1521/siso.2023.87.1.95>.

and with communism early in 1844 at the latest (at which point Engels was already a communist) to the publishing of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*.

The period also marks a practical period in Marx and Engels' politics between their democratic activism in Germany and the revolutions of 1848 where communism and the proletariat emerged for the first time as an active political force of world-historical importance. As Engels (1990, 357) would later describe it, these years were 'the period of Germany's preparation for the Revolution of 1848', both in politics and in thought.

Within Marx-Engels research, this period is usually approached philosophically with discussion of the relationship between the 'young' Marx represented by the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* and the 'old(er)' Marx of *The German Ideology* and beyond. Yet this approach to the period can marginalise the political context in which Marx and Engels wrote and the importance to them of the proletariat to the coming revolution. Marx and Engels' development from 1842 until 1848 (and beyond) ought to be seen with this in mind, as their attempts to understand and respond to political issues pushed them into new research fields and conclusions. Marx (1975d, 131) himself would note in mid-1843 the importance of 'political questions of the day' not being considered within the realm of philosophy alone. In an attempt to solve political questions, Marx and Engels had to turn to what we would now call sociology and develop an understanding of the real social and economic situation.

Their recognition of the proletariat's lack of property and miserable social standing meant they could identify it as a revolutionary democratic force in 1843 which was quickly extended to a revolutionary anti-capitalist force for communism. At this point Marx and Engels grasped the importance of a merger between the communist and working-class movements and recognised the need for active development of both communist theory and working-class politics for this to take effect. This was the historical pretext for important theoretical advances of the late 1840s.

This also motivated Marx and Engels to address several important strategic and tactical issues. These included the relationship between reform and revolution, the goals of international solidarity, and potential political alliances with non-proletarian groups. These are still debated issues in the sociology of work and labour/social movements today, and so returning to how Marx and Engels developed their own views on the proletariat is an important endeavour for contemporary Marxist political sociology.

1842-3 and the Rheinische Zeitung

In 1842, Marx's philosophy was in a very early stage of its development, largely constrained by a lack of political economy and his abstract-idealist view of freedom as the basis of human nature. Regardless, he still held deep concern for the conditions of working people as part of his democratic criticism of the Prussian state in his articles for the *Rheinische Zeitung* (May 1842 – March 1843). For example, in his article 'Debates on the Law on Thefts of Wood' Marx demanded 'for the poor, politically and socially propertyless many [*arme politisch und social besitzlose Menge*]' (Marx 1975c, 230; 1975j, 204) a customary right to fallen wood against the bill of the Provincial Assembly. In January 1843, Marx (1975f, 347) noted the disregard of the state towards the plight of Mosel wine-growers and the influence of the aristocracy on the state, noting that 'if he carries out the work which nature and custom have ordained for him, the state should create conditions for him in which he can grow, prosper, and live'. Engels (2004, 497) would later reminisce that,

I am sure of the facts in as much as Marx always used to tell me that it was precisely his preoccupation with the law on thefts of wood and the condition of the Mosel wine-growers that led him from politics pure and simple to economic conditions and thus to socialism.

During this period Marx provides a critique of capitalism largely influenced by Moses Hess' *On the Essence of Money*, which did not provide a central role for the proletariat or class struggle. He instead focused on providing a critique of money as an economic mediator that blocked realisation of the human essence (Musto 2009). At this point Marx (1975h, 149) understands the importance of differentiating 'political emancipation [and] general human emancipation' yet it is only on this general, humanist

basis. Despite the clear gaps in how Marx understands class society in 1842 and early 1843, the importance of this period for his future theoretical investigation and political development should not be underestimated.

Friedrich Engels, at this moment in time, had a much more intimate and political understanding of the proletariat due to his social status and position within industry in Manchester, England. In a series of articles for the *Rheinische Zeitung* at the end of 1842, he discussed the possibility of revolution in England, noting that ‘although industry makes a country rich, it also creates a class of unpropertied, absolutely poor people...which multiplies rapidly’. As conditions worsened, there would be nothing ‘left for these people to do but revolt’ (Engels 1975d, 373).

In his view, the working class was beginning ‘to be conscious of itself’, ‘becoming more and more imbued with the radical-democratic principles of Chartism’ ‘as the expression of its collective consciousness [*Gesamtbewußtseins*]’ (Engels 1975e, 375-6; 1985c, 444) and form a political party on this Chartist basis. Simultaneously, he noted how portions of the English working-class were attracted to socialism without a coherent socialist political party yet existing (Engels 1985a). This development, foreshadowing later pillars of Marxist thought, made Engels (1975d, 374) believe that ‘[social] revolution is inevitable in England’. Thus, while Marx approached the proletariat as a philosophical actor, Engels first grasped it as it was, i.e., as a force for political and social change.

The Arrival of the Proletariat for Marx and the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*

The first recognition of a specific role for the proletariat by Marx comes in his ‘Introduction to the Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*’, written sometime before February 1844 and published in the *Deutsch–Französische Jahrbücher*. Here he is concerned, like with many of his earlier writings, on the requirements for democratic emancipation in Prussia. Marx arrives at a Prussian-exceptionalist position, arguing that while in ‘France partial emancipation is the basis of universal emancipation; in

Germany universal emancipation is the *conditio sine qua non* of any partial emancipation'. We do not find the later sentiment of worldwide workers' unity, but its opposite, the '*Emancipation des Deutschen* [the emancipation of the German]' (1982d, 183). Here with his proletariat-centred view, he has progressed past the bourgeois democratic position but it has not yet become an identifiably communist perspective.

Marx views the proletariat alone as being the class to achieve this German emancipation due to its negative attributes, in his words, 'by *material* necessity, by its *very chains*'. This proletariat 'cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all other spheres of society and thereby emancipating all other spheres of society' (Marx 1975a, 186). Thus, the class that Marx would come to dedicate his life's research to only entered his awareness as a young man as a (partial) solution to a question of prior political-philosophical importance to him – German democracy.

At this point Marx is beginning to focus more on questions of politics, even if his approach is still primarily philosophical. As he himself realises, '[a]s philosophy finds its *material* weapons in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its *spiritual* weapons in philosophy' (Marx 1975a, 187). In *Vorwärts!*

² later that year Marx (1975b, 205) would write about revolution from a clearly class-oriented perspective, arguing that,

The *political soul* of revolution...consists in the *tendency* of classes having no political influence to abolish their *isolation* from *statehood* and *rule*... [S]ocialism cannot be realised without *revolution*. It needs this *political* act insofar as it needs *destruction* and *dissolution*.

Just as this marked a significant development in Marx's thought, the closing of the *Deutsch–Französische Jahrbücher* marked the end of the Young Hegelians. As Nicolaievsky and Maenchen-Helfen (1976, 75) note, 'at the end of the road taken by political radicalism in its criticism of the irrational Prussian state lay communism, the abolition of private property, the proletarian revolution'. Young Hegelianism

² NB: a Parisian-German publication, not to be confused with the later SPD paper of the same name. See Rokitjanski (1987) for more on Marx and the earlier Parisian émigré *Vorwärts!*.

disintegrated, either turning to communism or insular apolitical philosophy, most notably ‘absolute’ criticism. This philosophical divide was spurred on by the activities of the Prussian state, which actively suppressed and destroyed copies of the émigré *Jahrbücher* inside Germany and at the border, just as they had done to the *Rheinische Zeitung* the year before. The persecuted democratic-critical philosophers were in many ways forced by the régime they criticised to either make peace or extend their politics into communism.

The remainder of 1844 would highlight just how divergent the paths of the former Young Hegelians would be. Against Bruno Bauer and the Young Hegelians who advocated a philosophy where ‘[t]he critic should participate neither in the sufferings nor in the joys of society’ (quoted in Marx 1975g, 356) Marx has a philosophy deeply connected with politics and ultimately political solutions. Despite the pieces still to be figured out, Marx sees alienation and suffering as a problem caused by private property, and thus as a problem ‘by no means merely a problem of understanding, but a *real* problem of life, which *philosophy* could not solve precisely because it conceived this problem as *merely* a theoretical one’ (Marx 1975e 302). Earlier in 1844 he had noted that the ‘task of philosophy [is] to unmask self-alienation [*Selbstentfremdung*]’ (Marx 1975a, 176). This task was increasingly taking him out of philosophy into political economy and other ‘problems of life’.

In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* Marx discusses the ‘self-alienation’ (Marx 1982a, 243) of man in society, including through participation in labour. Yet he also recognises the connection of alienation and estranged labour with private property, noting that if ‘the product of labour does not belong to the worker, if it confronts him as an alien power, then this can only be because it belongs to some *other man than the worker*.’ He also begins to discuss the circulation of capital, writing that alienated labour and alienated life ‘is as a result of the *movement of private property* [*Bewegung der Privateigentums*]’ and also, private property is the ‘realisation of this alienation’ (Marx 1975e, 278-80; 1982a, 244).

This dual understanding of self-alienation and a particularly capitalist alienation allows Marx to begin to differentiate the revolutionary potential of the working class under capitalism from that of earlier societies with private property (the examples of ancient Rome and Turkey are given). He distinguishes between ‘indifferent antithesis’ of ‘lack of property and property’ and the ‘antithesis of *labour* and *capital*’. Capitalism’s development from this general antithesis into an active contradiction of capital and labour, the ‘developed state of contradiction’ imbues labour with subjective essence of private property, and thus allows for its ‘resolution [*Auflösung*]’ (Marx 1975e, 293-4; 1982a, 260). This is what allows for human society to, for the first time, negate this negation in a communist transformation.

Marx’s communism here is based upon ‘positive transcendence of *private property* as *human self-estrangement*, and therefore as the real *appropriation* of the *human* essence by and for man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a *social* (i.e. human) being’ (296). As he notes ‘[t]his communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism’. The socialisation of property, by replacing with the capitalist as owner of the product of labour, allows in turn for the end of *self-estrangement*.

This ‘[Feuerbachian] philosophical basis for socialism’ (Marx 1975c, 354) sits, somewhat uncomfortably, alongside Marx’s class-oriented proletarian communism in 1844. He is already engaging with the working-class as a practical movement, even with excitement. While in Paris he had followed the Silesian weavers’ uprising from afar, even believing it to have a ‘superior character’ to all French and German workers’ movements due to an ‘opposition to the society of private property’ (Marx 1975b, 201). It is worth noting that Engels (1985b, 609) drew a different conclusion, simply noting that the riots showed ‘the consequences of the factory system, of the progress of machinery, etc. for the working classes are quite the same on the continent as they are in England: oppression and toil for the many, riches and wealth for the few’. The Silesian unrest highlights the backgrounds of each man, with Engels by now familiar with workers’ movements within England and his measured opinion of it contrasted to

Marx's revolutionary excitement – perhaps from dealing with the working class primarily as a theoretical, albeit revolutionary construct. In coming years both would further investigate the theory and practice of what a workers' revolution would look like.

1845 – Marxism and Worker Movements

By the beginning of 1845, Marx and Engels had been exploring both capitalism and communism for several years, and had developed significantly further than it may seem if one takes *The German Ideology* or the *1844 Manuscripts* as their starting point for Marx. To highlight just how developed their ideas at the beginning of 1845 were in comparison to later 'classics of Marxism' it is useful to revisit Engels' 'Speeches in Elberfeld' delivered to communist mass meetings. Here Engels (1975b, 243-4; 1962b, 537) presents a class prognosis as follows,

The individual capitalist is involved in struggle with all the other capitalists; the individual worker with all the other workers; all the capitalists fight against the workers just as the mass of workers in turn have, of necessity, to fight against the mass of capitalists. ... The ruin of the small middle class... is the first result of this struggle...

Thus there arises the glaring contradiction between a few rich people on one hand and many poor on the other; a contradiction which has already risen to a menacing point in England and France, and is daily growing sharper in our country too. And as long as the present basis of society is retained, so long will it be impossible to halt the progressing enrichment of a few individuals and the impoverishment of the great majority: the contradiction will develop more and more sharply until finally necessity compels society to reorganise itself on more rational principles [*die Gesellschaft zu einer Reorganisation nach vernünftigeren Prinzipien zwingt*].'

One may note a remarkable similarity between the Elberfeld speech and the *Manifesto of the Communist Party's* theses where 'the lower strata of the middle class...sink gradually into the proletariat' and '[t]he modern labourer...sinks deeper and

deeper’ until ‘[s]ociety can no longer live under this bourgeoisie’ (Marx and Engels, 1976b, 491; 495-6). These ideas of the *Manifesto* are far more known than their equivalent at Elberfeld and do not need to be quoted at length. The significance of their similarity is simply highlighting that by early 1845, i.e. before *The German Ideology*, etc. we can find an identifiably Marxist political prognosis expressed in comfortably Marxist terms even if they later developed past it (see Potier, 2020).

Meanwhile, Marx was beginning his first thorough investigation of political economy, which we can follow for the first time within Section Four of the MEGA2. These notebooks are incredibly important for following the development of how he understood the proletariat, as many noted concepts also appear in his published works of the period as well as his later works. For example, Marx notes the proletariat’s ‘lifelong dependency [*lebenslängliche Abhängigkeit*]’ on wage-labour turning them into a ‘public beggar [*öffentlichen Bettler*]’ (Marx 1981b, 125) within the Kreuznacher notebooks, and, from Ricardo, the existence of a relative surplus population of ‘the *unemployed* Proletariat [*dem arbeitslosen Proletariat*]’ (Marx 1981a, 416, emphasis in original).

Particularly notable within the Manchester Notebooks is Marx’s notes on the pamphlet *Labour’s Wrongs and Labour’s Remedy* by the Chartist economist John Francis Bray which cover almost 60 pages – a third of Bray’s text . Within these copious notes we see Marx (2015, 15) note the need to *critique* political economy ‘on their own ground and soil and with their own weapons’. While Marx (1976c) would later critique Bray’s critique based on ‘unequal exchange’, some of this, such as wage labour’s function as ‘Sklaverei [slavery] in nature, if not in name’ (Marx 2015, 10) would remain with Marx. Perhaps most interestingly is Marx’s note from Bray that the working class’s ability to organise in trade unions and from small dues collect ‘vast sums of money’ highlighted its future potential to operate a ‘social system of community of property and equality of rights’ after capitalism (Marx 2015, 37). Here Marx further extends himself past the limits of contemporary political economy and the bounds of capitalist society itself in his understanding of the proletariat.

Marx (1987, 265) would drop his studies of political economy during the events of 1848-49 and later claim he began ‘from the very beginning’ upon arriving in London in 1951. Regardless, however, Marx’s notebooks highlight the variety of academic and political sources he engaged with that influenced, sometimes significantly, his understanding of the proletariat and its connection to socialism.

The connection of the working-class movement and the basis for socialism is also dealt with by Engels in greater detail soon after in his *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, particularly within the chapter ‘*Arbeiterbewegungen*’, or ‘worker-movements’, translated within the *MECW* as ‘Labour Movements’ (Engels 1962a, 430; 1975c, 501). He here seeks to demonstrate how the English ‘revolt of the workers...has passed through several phases (1975c, 502), beginning with crime, before quickly moving on to more serious, organised forms – worker movements.

Trade Unions

The first form of worker-movement which Engels seriously discusses is that of the early trade unions. His assessment of the power of trade unions is pessimistic, noting that the ‘history of these Unions is a long series of defeats... interrupted by a few isolated victories’. While he notes that unions are ‘powerful’ when dealing with ‘minor, single influences’, he holds a pessimistic view of their ability to deal with the ‘*great* [economic] forces’ that shape the labour market as the main barrier preventing trade unions and strikes from having significant transformational effects (Engels 1975c, 505). Nevertheless, Engels remains optimistic in a broader sense, seeing the structural problems of the unions as simply part of the continual development of the form of worker-movement, writing:

The workers are coming to perceive more clearly with every day how competition affects them; they see far more clearly than the bourgeois that competition of the capitalists among themselves presses upon workers too, by bringing on commercial crisis, and that this competition, too, must be abolished. They will soon learn *how* they have to go about it. (Engels 1975c, 508)

Chartism

Chartism was a (now little-known) English workers' political movement that, in Engels' words, sought 'to put a proletarian law [*Proletariengesetz*] in the place of the legal fabric of the bourgeoisie. This proposed Law is the People's Charter, which in form is purely political, and demands a democratic basis for the House of Commons.' (Engels 1962a, 444). The role of the Chartists in the political turmoil of 1842 had led to the 'decisive separation of the proletariat from the bourgeoisie' despite the fact 'their Socialism [was] very little developed' (Engels 1975c, 517-22). Despite this lack of development, the Chartists greatly attracted Engels' attention as an independent, revolutionary movement of the working class.

Socialism

Engels (1975c, 525-7) also considers the English socialists 'so far only as it affects the working class'. While they may be more theoretically developed than the Chartists, the bourgeois origin of leading socialists like Owen mean they do not approach matters from a proletarian standpoint and do not integrate on any significant scale with the workers' movement. He writes,

The Socialists are more far-seeing, propose practical remedies against distress, but, proceeding originally from the bourgeoisie, are for this reason unable to amalgamate completely with the working class. The union of Socialism with Chartism...will be the next step and has already begun.

Thus Engels, with the benefit of a couple years hindsight, extends his analysis of the merger between socialism and the English workers' movement found in the *Rheinische Zeitung* and reasserts the necessity of the theoretical development of a new 'proletarian socialism' (Engels 1975c, 526). The time and resources he would commit to this would become well-known.

While Engels is by far clearer in his writing on class struggle, perhaps due to his increased focus on social science during the period compared to Marx's philosophical polemics, we also see Marx begin to identify further explicitly with what would later become key tenets of Marxist socialism. For example, in his critique of Friedrich List

in March 1845 (unpublished in his lifetime), Marx (1976b, 280) notes that ‘[t]he nationality of the worker is neither, French, nor English, nor German, it is *labour, free slavery, self huckstering*. His government is neither French, nor German, nor English, it is *capital*’. This ‘lack of nationality’ principle would return in the *Manifesto*.

It is here where we also find Marx begin to develop his ideas of the socialist state. In his notebooks of the time, he engages with a wide variety of literature including Brissot’s where he notes that one must either ‘break the [state] machinery completely [*ganz die Maschine zerbrechen*]’ (Marx 1998, 427; noted by him in italics) or face continued exploitation. When making these theoretical lineages, however, it is important to remember that Marx was not working backwards like a Marxologist. He was rather developing his political and theoretical understanding as his inquiry and current events pushed him to extend it further.

Contextualising The German Ideology

Thus by the advent of 1846, Marx and Engels had a fairly developed understanding of communism as a practical viewpoint, as well as general materialism as their philosophical standpoint. The fundamental realisation 1846 would bring them was, as it would come to be called, the materialist theory of history. As Marx would write in his *Theses on Feuerbach*, individuals did not exist in the abstract but belong ‘to a particular form of society’ (1975i, 5). If the ‘old materialism’, including his earlier philosophical work, had a standpoint in ‘*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*’, Marx argued, materialists must now take a standpoint in ‘*menschliche Gesellschaft*’, or human society (Marx 1978, 7).

The key implication this had for Marx and Engels’ outlook was that ‘the economic forms in which man produces, consumes and exchanges are transitory and historical. With the acquisition of new productive faculties man changes his mode of production’ (Marx, 1982b, 97). This new materialist view of history, rather than force Marx and Engels to rethink their theory of communism, allowed them to further grasp the implications of communism and requirements of the abolition of capitalism. *The*

German Ideology is a text of many debates within Marxology from the epistemological break to the manuscripts themselves (see Carver and Blank 2014) which cannot be elaborated here. Rather, this chapter highlights how ideas extended or proposed for the first time in this text have a direct theoretical lineage to Marx and Engels' work in years previous.

For example, they retain a focus on alienation as a development from private property and the division of labour, however they also note that this alienation [*Entfremdung*] 'can, [*natürlich*], only be abolished [*aufgehoben*] given two *practical* premises... it must have necessarily have rendered the great mass of humanity 'propertyless', and moreover in contradiction to an existing world of wealth.' (Marx and Engels 1975a, 48; Marx and Engels 2017, 37). This discussion of alienation is distinct from the discussion of alienation in classical German philosophy, with them criticising how at 'every historical stage "man" was substituted for the individuals existing hitherto and shown as the motive force of history. The whole process was thus conceived as a 'process of the self-estrangement [*Selbstentfremdungsprozess*] of "man"' (Marx and Engels 1975, 88; 2017, 114). A new recognition of objective socio-economic forms and their development turns alienation from a philosophical into a sociological or political concept, one which can thus be integrated into communist politics.

The two men also criticised, as was common for them in this period, those who thought that this alienation could be overcome by any change in the mode of production apart from an advance to communism (see the later discussion of the *Manifesto*). Here they (Marx and Engels 1975, 88) instead propose a revolution to socialise the means of production, and economic relations more broadly.

Modern universal intercourse cannot be controlled by individuals, unless it is controlled by all. This appropriation is further determined by the manner in which it must be effected. It can only be effected through a union, which by the character of the proletariat itself can again only be a universal one, and through a revolution

Marx and Engels also develop their understanding of why the working class has the potential and the responsibility of communist revolution in *The German Ideology*. Developing off what Marx had recognised in *Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Marx and Engels (1975, 80) argue that,

While the fugitive serfs only wished to have full scope to develop and assert those conditions of existence which were already there, and hence, in the end, only arrived at free labour, the proletarians, if they are to assert themselves as individuals, have to abolish the hitherto prevailing condition of their existence.

In their view, this workers' movement would be led by the industrial proletarians, but not exclusively composed of them. As they write,

The proletarians created by large-scale industry assume leadership of this movement and carry the whole mass along with them, and because the workers excluded from large-scale industry are placed by it in a still worse situation than the workers in large-scale industry itself.

This process is not limited to the industrial capitalist countries, then much fewer in number than today. Marx and Engels argued that the expansion of international trade, and competition between industrialised and pre-industrialised countries, would be 'sufficient to produce a similar contradiction in countries with a less advanced industry' (74-5).

The German Ideology, particularly with how Marx and Engels approach the proletariat, socialism, and revolution within it, cannot be seen as a 'new foundation' for the birth of Marxism or scientific socialism. Many of its ideas, from the role of the proletariat to the necessity of revolution can be found in their writing from 1843-1845, when much more significant shifts in their thinking occurred. This is not to dismiss the importance of their realisations in 1846, and the rise of their 'materialist conception of history'. This new philosophical outlook, allowing for deeper economic and political inquiry, superseded Feuerbachian materialism as the philosophical foundation for socialism and allowed their ideas to be continued and extended further, notably also into the realm of politics.

Marx and Engels as activists

It was in this period beginning in 1846 that Marx and Engels began to commit themselves to membership of political organisations as part of their efforts to merge socialism with the working-class movement. If it was also a period of significant development, as discussed above, it was a period of intense political contest within communism, Engels (1982a, 105) noting to Marx that, ‘there is a large faction in the German Communist Party which bears me a grudge because I am opposed to its Utopias’.

For the first time here we see their writing, while still dealing with common issues of democracy, private property, etc., in a new context, that of practical and direct discussion of the theory and practice behind a communist workers’ movement. Therefore these writings are particularly important, in tandem with the more philosophic or political economic ‘classics’, for understanding the development of Marx and Engels.

These political interventions give clear statements of the two men’s politics intended for public distribution and are thus a medium in which Marx and Engels sought to discuss and popularise on a political level the theoretical developments of their new proletarian communism. For example, Engels (1982d, 82; 1979b, 54) gave the following objectives of communism as a real movement to the Communist Correspondence Committee in Brussels in October 1846,

1. to ensure that the interests of the proletariat prevail, as opposed to those of the bourgeoisie; 2. to do so by abolishing [*Aufhebung*] private property and replacing same with community of goods; 3. to recognise no means of attaining these aims other than democratic revolution by force [*die gewaltsame, demokratische Revolution*].

This remark shows, in summary form, how many earlier theoretical conclusions such as the emancipatory role of the proletariat, necessity of the overcoming of private property, and the need for social emancipation had made their way along with Marx and Engels from Young Hegelianism to communism.

The period from 1846 to the outbreak of the 1848 revolutions allowed for Marx and Engels to develop important aspects of a political theory of revolution, transition to

communism and the role of the proletariat in this process that more philosophical writing could not. Three broad aspects of this political viewpoint can be identified.

The proletariat must organise on an international level.

The basics of Marx and Engels' internationalism has already been briefly raised, and is well-known to all familiar with Marxism or the *Manifesto*. Yet it is worth discussion in somewhat further detail to understand, beyond sloganeering, how the two men envisaged the national and the international within communism.

In 1846 Engels would note the 'proletarian party' is 'carrying out' 'the fraternisation of nations ... in contrast to the old instinctive national egoism' and the 'hypocritical...cosmopolitanism of free trade' (Engels 1976d, 4). Free trade, despite its 'cosmopolitanism' however, would also contribute to this fraternisation by expanding capitalism's contradictions and allowing a global working class to 'stand face-to-face' (Engels 1976e, 290). Marx (1982c, 39) would further note how the internationalisation of communist organisation and discussion would help 'rid itself of the barriers of nationality', not in the sense that nationality would cease to exist but that it would no longer be an impediment to the working-class struggle. This is notably distinct from the popular view of their position on nationality taken from remarks made elsewhere.

Within this internationalism there remains the national struggles against class society, the struggle which led Marx to the proletariat to begin with. In an article for the *Deutsche-Brüsseler-Zeitung* in February 1848, Engels (1975f, 544) would reject 'the cowardly German burghers' and instead place his hopes on 'the German workers' to 'with a radical revolution restore the honour of Germany.' In some ways, his view on the role of the proletariat expressed here is a simple development from Marx's first conclusions in 'Introduction to Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*'.

Yet it is not that simple. Marx and Engels' positions on the issue of Poland's independence highlight a tension that exists within the national question during the capitalist era – in this case one that would foreshadow later debates in the Second and

early Third Internationals on the same issue. In speeches to mark the 17th anniversary of the Polish uprising, Engels would note that ‘the liberation of Germany cannot therefore take place without the liberation of Poland from German oppression’. Marx however, focused on a different road to liberation, proposing that ‘Poland must not be liberated simply in Poland, but in England’ due to ‘the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie [being] the most highly developed’ in England (Marx and Engels 1976c, 389). Thus a tension exists in Marx and Engels’ work between not just the working class as emancipators of their own nation and of international humanity, but also between class as emancipator of nation and nation as emancipator of class.

The proletariat must continue the work of the bourgeois revolutions as communist revolutions.

As Communists, Marx and Engels did not see the overthrow of the old monarchies and feudal orders as the end goal. In fact, Engels (1976c, 75-6) viewed the bourgeoisie as a more formidable opponent than the Prussian aristocracy, noting,

The transition from the absolute monarchy to the modern representative state in no way abolishes the poverty of the great mass of the people, but only brings a new class, the bourgeoisie, to power...[I]t is precisely this bourgeoisie which, by means of its capital, presses most heavily upon the masses and hence is the opponent *par excellence* of the Communists.

This, of course, has become a well-known political tenet of Marxism. Yet for Marx, it was not as simple as rising up against the bourgeoisie. He argued that a proletarian uprising would be ‘only an element in the service of the *bourgeois revolution* itself’ provided ‘the material conditions have not yet been created which make necessary the abolition of the bourgeois mode of production’ and the ‘overthrow of [its] political rule’ (Marx 1976a, 319). Thus the transition to a proletarian revolutionary process is not just a political matter, but one of both continuity and rupture, with the proletariat first exercising independent political organisation while still on a bourgeois playing field.

During this period, Engels would emphasise both the possibility and importance of reforms under capitalism, arguing that ‘all measures to restrict competition and the accumulation of capital....are not only possible as revolutionary measures, but actually necessary.’ His belief in these reforms, however, originates with a very optimistic view of how these reforms would impact the working class. As he argued, ‘[these reforms] will compel the proletariat to go further and further until private property has been completely abolished, in order not to lose what it has already won’ (Engels 1976b, 295).

The relationship between the bourgeois and proletarian revolutions in Marx and Engels’ thought is complex, with an underlying focus on continued struggle, what they would later note as ‘revolution in permanence’. The abolition of the monarchy would not immediately allow, on an economic level, the abolition of private property and the capitalist mode of production. Therefore, the working class must fight and push for what it can change while under capitalist society in preparation for the time they can overthrow it.

Communist revolutions are inseparable from democracy.

This communist process of social revolution is intimately wound up for both Marx and Engels with democratic revolution and the expansion of democracy. Engels would even go as far as to note, with a bit of humour, that ‘all European democrats in 1846 are more or less Communists at heart’ (Engels 1976d, 5) and to introduce Marx to Louis Blanc as ‘*le chef de notre parti (i.e. de la fraction la plus avancée de la démocratie allemande)*’ [the head of our party (i.e. the most advanced portion of German democracy)] (Engels 1979a, 147).³ Indeed, both Marx and Engels were involved in émigré democratic associations, often inseparable from the local Communist movement.

Democracy as used here is quite theoretically interesting as it refers to not just the anti-monarchist movement for a democratic republic, but also to democracy as a prerequisite and a strategy for communism, as previously mentioned with Engels’

³ This passage appears in French in the original German-language letter which is preserved here for textual fidelity.

discussion of the ‘democratic revolution by force’. In a forerunner to the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, a document stating the League of Communists’ principles drafted by Engels and later approved by the First Congress of the League in mid-1847, he argued that the ‘first, fundamental condition’ for communism, referred to here as ‘community of property’, is the ‘political liberation of the proletariat through a democratic constitution’ [*politische Befreiung des Proletariats durch eine demokratische Staatsverfassung*] (Engels 1976a, 102; Andréas 1969, 57). Combined with the discussion of social and economic reforms above and Engels’ earlier praise for Chartism, we can see, not without controversy, Marx and Engels’ strategy as being the formation of a communist party in a democratic republic which would, as part of the workers’ movement, fight for reforms and raise class consciousness until it could stagewise abolish private property and bourgeois political rule.

The Manifesto of the Communist Party and the ‘Merger Narrative’

The *Manifesto of the Communist Party* was (originally) a practical-political document written by Marx and Engels at the direction of the League of Communists and was to serve as its political platform. Popular belief has long been that Marx was its primary writer⁴, in no small part thanks to Engels’ (1989b, 118) incredibly modest insistence that its ‘basic thought belongs solely and exclusively to Marx’. In reality, Engels played a significant role in the drafting and creation of the *Manifesto*, based off his earlier *Communist Confession of Faith* and *Principles of Communism*. In late 1847, he sent both to Marx noting ‘we would do best to abandon the catechetical form and call the thing *Communist Manifesto*’ (Engels 1982a, 149). As such, many of its ideas were not

⁴ See for instance, Nicolaevsky & Maenchen-Helfen (1976, 144): “the fundamentals, the groundwork, belong to Marx alone. Marx gave it its form too. It is Marx’s tremendous power that flows from every word, it is his fire with which the most brilliant pamphlet in world literature illuminates the times.”

new to Marx or Engels, and as previously discussed, can be found even years earlier in both their writings.

This is particularly the case for the first section of the *Manifesto*, ‘Bourgeois and Proletarians’, which deals with the perceived division of capitalist society into the two great eponymous classes. This, as already discussed, had its theoretical foundations established for Marx and Engels by at least the beginning of 1845. Its final words ‘[the bourgeoisie’s] fall and the victory of the proletariat’ (Marx and Engels 1976b, 496) are (in)famous, either as a statement of faith, or as an over-simplified example of Communist determinism.

The second and third sections of the *Manifesto* however, when read carefully, highlight that Marx and Engels did not treat this as a (fully) deterministic historical process but one that required constant political intervention to realise. This refers to what Lars T. Lih (2008, 39) calls the ‘merger formula’ of how to combine socialism with the workers’ movement for a genuinely revolutionary force. As previously discussed, this by 1848 was a task that long had occupied both Marx and Engels.

The second section, ‘Proletarians and Communists’, begins to discuss this relationship. Immediately, the pair stress the importance of a proletarian socialism, arguing that Communists ‘only’ distinguish themselves from the working class as a whole by ‘[bringing] to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat’ and ‘[representing] the interests of the movement as a whole’. This process is nothing less than the ‘formation of the proletariat into a class’ (Marx and Engels 1976b, 497-8). The important context of this discussion of communism’s principles is a recognition that the proletariat *will not* be able to even organise itself as a revolutionary movement without active intervention of class-conscious revolutionaries, let alone go as far as to abolish capitalism altogether.

Following from this, in the third section, the two communists polemicise against various other forms of socialism to argue why this proletarian communism is important in an attempt to convince these would-be revolutionaries. The first instance, the feudal

socialists, are those who wave ‘the proletarian alms-bag’ in an attempt to get the working-class to line up against the bourgeoisie to restore the feudal order (507). Clearly, these are the wrong socialists, even if they did seek to politically organise the working class. Other forms of socialism discussed either focus on the wrong workers, like petty-bourgeois socialism focused on shopkeepers and the middle peasantry, or do not focus on the working-class. These were socialists like Proudhon, who Marx argued ‘wished for a bourgeoisie without a proletariat’ (Marx and Engels 1976b, 513).

The discussion of these different socialisms and their relationship to the workers’ movement does not just deal with Marx and Engels’ recent direct opponents, such as Proudhon or German socialists with which they had both previously polemicised with (Marx 1976c; Marx and Engels, 1976a) but also other movements such as the English Owenites and Chartists. Here Engels’ influence is particularly apparent as well as the desire for a *complete* critique of hitherto-existing socialisms and how they engage with the proletariat. The merger narrative, in contesting every existing socialism, sought to refund it on the basis of the workers’ movement in practice just as they had begun to do theoretically in the years previous.

It is this merger narrative that later Social Democrats like Plekhanov (1977) and the young Lenin (1975) took from the *Manifesto* and in large part defined Marxist strategy against its theoretical opponents during the days of the Second International.

The Revolution of 1848 and the Neue Rheinische Zeitung

The social uprisings and revolutions across Western Europe in 1848 arose as Marx and Engels reached a certain political maturity with the publication of the *Manifesto*, and both communists played an active role in the events. A dedicated biography of the period, such as Auguste Cornu’s (1948) effort cannot be repeated here. Rather, this will focus on their revolutionary journalism in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, edited by Marx from June 1848 to May 1849 which sought to publish ‘anything likely to serve the cause

of democracy in any country’ (Marx 1977b, 12). The paper has particular use for understanding where Marx and Engels stood on questions of practical importance.

Similar to the earlier political speeches, the writings in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* allow us to see the ideas of Marx and Engels expressed in a more popular context than many of their larger, more scholarly works. The value of these sources for a textual study of Marx and Engels comes from the particular fact they required both the ‘Marxification of common language’ and a ‘process of extension of Marxist political language’. In the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* we do not find their old vocabulary from ‘a theoretical space’, e.g. ‘positive transcendence, universalisation of the dominant class’, etc. but a vocabulary within ‘a political space’ (Trinh 1980, xii) with terms such as ‘ideological cretins’, ‘sovereignty’, ‘nice revolution’, etc. Here, the conclusions and further investigations of the 1840s are expressed in the applied, popular form and their views on the proletariat and socialist strategy are stated directly.

This had several implications for how Marx and Engels discuss class and revolution. At times, they present events with purely political actors, for example, referring to the ‘reaction’, ‘counter-revolution’, ‘Camphausen Ministry’ (Marx 2016, 155), and so on. Individual actors are connected up with classes as their political representatives. For example, Engels (2016a, 81a) notes that the ‘Bourgeois Hansemann’, a politician, does not support the high bourgeoisie [*hohe Bourgeoisie*] – the ‘conservative class’ but the high landed nobility [*hohe Grundadel*], distinguished as the ‘reactionary class’. Elsewhere, classes are treated as political actors in their own right (Engels 2016d). This was a writing style aimed at enabling both political journalism and more sociological discussion of class and revolution.

As they had anticipated, the revolutions of early 1848 were both bourgeois and democratic. In Engels’ (1977a, 73) words, it produced ‘two sets of results’, since ‘the people was [sic.] victorious; it has won liberties of a pronounced democratic nature, but direct control [*unmittelbare Herrschaft*] had passed into the hands of the big bourgeoisie and not those of the people.’ Here Engels still approaches the ‘people’ as a democratic coalition against the high bourgeoisie of the ‘workers and the democratic

bourgeoisie [*Bürgerschaft*]. He would call this situation a ‘half revolution’ (Engels, 2016c, 110), therefore the democratic-revolutionary coalition needed to be maintained to complete it.

Yet events later in 1848 would challenge that viewpoint. Marx (1977a, 147) would declare in June that,

The *February revolution* was the *nice* revolution, the revolution of universal sympathies, because the contradictions which erupted in it against the monarchy were still *undeveloped*

The *June revolution* is the *ugly* revolution, the nasty revolution, because the phrases have given place to the real thing, because the republic has bared the head of the monster by knocking off the crown which shielded and concealed it

Now Marx and Engels became more certain about the *actuality* of independent working-class struggle. Engels (1977, 445) argued, ‘in Vienna and Paris, in Berlin and Frankfurt, in London and Milan the point at issue is the *overthrow of the political rule of the bourgeoisie*’. Whereas the Chartists and earlier working-class movements had arisen as indication of their future potential to overthrow capitalism, ‘every uprising that now takes place is a direct threat to the political existence of the bourgeoisie, and an indirect threat to its social existence’. Hence a reactionary shift was also expected from the ascendant bourgeoisie. Due to the revolutionary working class, it will have to give ‘pride of place’ to ‘the military, bureaucratic and junker state’. This realignment of forces had led to what they both saw as the first ‘revolution of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie’ (Marx and Engels 2016, 193). Their political projections of the *Manifesto* were in their eyes validated in practice.

Conclusion

This chapter revisits a period of development for Marx and Engels that is well-known yet usually approached in research with discussion of the so-called ‘epistemological break’ debate and the relationship between the ‘young’ and ‘old’ Marx. Without trying to dismiss the importance of these questions, it presents a different approach to research

of the period focused on the proletariat itself as the main subject of Marx and Engels' thought from 1843 onwards.

Marx and Engels both first encountered the working class – whether in Prussia or England – out of concern for its condition and social welfare. This class first entered Marx's plan for revolution not to bring socialism but to overthrow Prussian autocracy where the bourgeoisie had failed. Yet Marx's reasoning for this, the disconnection of the proletariat from the wealth and property of the ruling classes, is recognisably linked with his later, identifiably Marxian, understanding of the proletariat as wage-labourer. Through their own development and through further study of political economy Marx and Engels came to new ways of thinking and conclusions while continuing along the same line of inquiry centred around the situation and revolutionary potential of the working class..

This development was not purely a theoretical process as Marx and Engels were actively involved in various democratic, or communist revolutionary groups. This was especially significant in their activity from 1846 onwards, when the two men become wholeheartedly active in the early communist movement. The pressing issues of communism, namely the relationships between reform and revolution; the national and the international; and that of socialism and the working class take up a considerable amount of Marx and Engels' writings.

Their political sociology by 1848 can be broadly summarised as follows: Capitalism is expanding worldwide, and internationalising the contradiction between capital and labour along with it. Work to integrate the communist movement with the working class is of utmost importance. Communists should also work to strengthen global solidarity of the working-class in its own organisational capacity, and to aid their domestic struggle for democracy and communism. After achieving a democratic state, the working-class movement can and must push for reforms against the interests of capital, ultimately leading to the overthrow of the bourgeoisie through democracy and through force, and the socialisation of property.

Chapter Two

Poland and the Development of Internationalism in Marx and Engels's Thought

The contemporary relationship between Poland and Marx(ism) is particularly strained. This can hardly be said to be the fault of Marx himself, of course, with the former Polish People's Republic the first thing that likely comes to mind when the two words are mentioned in the same sentence. Yet even if we try to forget the legacy of 'People's Poland', it is probably not Marx himself, but Rosa Luxemburg and her debate with Lenin over Polish independence in the first decades of the 20th century that replaces it

In this article, I make the case for remembering Marx and Engel's own relationship with Poland, and the cause of Polish independence. Despite an overall lack of attention, Marx and Engels were involved in the Polish solidarity movement and its political issues from the mid-1840s until their passing. Their writing on this issue is therefore a useful archive for understanding Marx and Engels' revolutionary politics, and their foreign policy in particular. Aside from general scholarly curiosity towards Marx, there are several main reasons why the relationship between Poland and Marx himself is a topic of particular interest today.

Marx's relationship with Poland helps contextualise him and his ideas in two ways. The first is within the legacy of Marxist thought on the national question which had a significant focus on the status of Poland for several decades culminating with the Polish-Soviet War and its aftermath (See Kautsky 1896; Luxemburg 2010). This is a longitudinal contextualisation that places Marx within the Marxist canon to clearly state both the points of unity and disagreements.

It is also useful for situating Marx cross-sectionally within the socialist, workers' and democratic circles of his own time. While the Polish socialist movement only began on a significant scale in the 1880s, English radical circles which Marx frequented maintained decades-long ties to Polish activists and the causes of independence and democracy for Poland (Brock 1953). These practical environments were where Marx's politics developed and were challenged in real time.

We do not have to look far for justification in using Poland to understand Marx's revolutionary politics in context. In fact, Marx (1983, 85) himself would write to Engels in 1856 that what 'led me *décidément* to plump for Poland was the historical fact that the intensity and the viability of all revolutions since 1789 may be gauged with fair accuracy by their attitude towards Poland. Poland is their "external" thermometer'.

In this article, I use his own approach to highlight the development of Marx and Engels' own *practical* approach to Poland as an 'external thermometer' of their broader revolutionary foreign policy. Where appropriate I discuss various aspects of this foreign policy, such as the international relations within different national sections of the workers' movement, practical policies which Marx or Engels advocated for, and their views on the relationship between different countries as a whole.

Due to the practical nature of this topic, I draw upon various sources including Marx and Engels' published works, manuscripts, speeches and letters, as well as the minute books and documents of the First International's General Council and the League of Communists. While Marx and Engels published several works touching on Poland, the political Marx exists outside of his written output alone. Marx and Engels' debate and discussion with comrades through written correspondence and in meetings is essential for thorough study of their politics.

This chapter proceeds in five mostly chronological sections. The first four discuss and contextualise Marx and Engels' views on Poland from the time leading up to the revolutions from 1848 to their active support for the nascent Polish socialist movement in the decades after the collapse of the First International. The fifth and final

section attempts to summarise the movement of their foreign policy with the aim of supporting anyone seeking to understand what a Marxist or socialist foreign policy may look like today.

The (Inter)national revolution until 1848

A focus on internationalism arose quite early within Marx and Engels' adult lifetimes as they found their way to the dual causes of democracy and socialism. Indeed, this was not coincidental. International solidarity of the working class was a key attribute of this grand social struggle. Engels (1976f, 6) would express these principles in his 1846 'Festival of Nations' speech:

[The] proletarians in all countries have one and the same interest, one and the same enemy, and one and the same struggle. The great mass of proletarians are, by their very nature, free from national prejudices and their whole disposition and movement is essentially humanitarian, anti-nationalist. Only the proletarians can destroy nationality, only the awakening proletariat can bring about fraternisation between the different nations.

The difference between 'nationality' and 'nation' in Marx and Engels' usage is important to grasp to understand this passage as a whole. To them, nationality meant 'belonging to a state' (Rosdolsky 1965, 333), whereas nation referred to the social grouping more broadly. Therefore, proletarian internationalism or fraternisation, as they would call it here, would not dissolve all distinction between national groups, but instead the state borders and political divides which separated the working peoples of the world.

The rejection of nationalism and nationality led them to reject the need for Polish independence from its Russian occupation. At a gathering in solidarity with the failed Polish revolution of 1830, Marx would proclaim that the 'old Poland is lost in any case, and we would be the last to wish for its restoration [*Wiederherstellung*]'. For him, the Polish struggle was a dead end under capitalism. 'The victory of the English proletarians...is decisive for the victory of all the oppressed over their oppressors. Hence Poland must be liberated not in Poland but in England' (Marx and Engels 1976c,

388-9). For Marx, the national question had been superseded in history by the social question.

There is significant evidence within documents pertaining to Marx and Engels' new political activism that they did not prioritise foreign policy or Poland within these areas either. For example, the German Communist Party makes no mention of Poland or any other issue of foreign policy within its 'Demands' (Marx et al. 1977). Neither do Engels' (1976a, 1976b) two draft programmatic documents for the League of Communists, 'Draft of a Communist Confession of Faith' and 'Principles of Communism' make any remarks more specific than the worldwide nature of the revolution.

Similarly, the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1976b, 497), provides two key principles on the internationalist basis of communism. Its second chapter, 'Proletarians and Communists' lists the following:

1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries; they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of nationality.
2. In the various stages of development that the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has had to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.

Under this schema there are common interests of the entire proletariat which, due to the uneven development of the working class, can be seen most clearly in England as an advanced capitalist country. These interests are the basis for liberation not just in England, but worldwide. This viewpoint is generalised within the *Manifesto* as follows: 'The supremacy of the proletariat will cause them to vanish still faster. United action, of the leading civilised countries at least, is one of the first conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat.' (Marx and Engels 1976, 530).

This Anglocentric internationalism is expressed in the practical political form of Marx's advice to the audience of his speech on Poland in 1847. He would advise that

‘you Chartists must not simply express pious wishes for the liberation of nations. Defeat your own internal enemies and you will then be able to pride yourselves on having defeated the entire old society’ (Marx and Engels 1976c, 389). Engels would repeat Marx’s argument in an article for *la Réforme*, writing that Poland ‘would be free only when the civilised nations of Western Europe had won democracy’. He would then be even more direct, nothing that ‘Poland would be saved by England’ (Engels 1976c, 391).

Here, like with Marx’s speech on Poland, the primary responsibility for worldwide emancipation is placed in the hands of the most developed capitalist countries – or at least their proletariat. In their speeches and writings on the Polish question the two men seem to imply this process is a direct consequence of their own revolutionary efforts. If this principle is accepted, the revolutionary socialist movement needs no foreign policy altogether. Yet other writing from this period, including elsewhere in the *Manifesto*, seems to contradict this view despite its clear elucidation.

The *Manifesto of the Communist Party*’s brief fourth chapter establishes a very clear position on Marx and Engels thought the workers’ movement should approach Poland. Unfortunately, this position not only stands in contradiction to their earlier advice on Poland given to the Chartists, but it seems to make an uneasy fit for the broader sketch for revolution within the *Manifesto* discussed above. In Poland, Communists, ‘support the party that insists on an agrarian revolution as the prime condition for national emancipation’ based upon the 1846 insurrection in Cracow. This programmatic note has no equivalent in earlier draft variations of the *Manifesto* and was potentially inserted due to the intervention of Lelewel, a Polish Communist and acquaintance of Marx and Engels within the League of Communists (Ciołkosz 1965). It also reflects a broader curiosity Marx and Engels held around the possibility of agrarian revolution in the unindustrialised world (Hammen 1972) that fits uneasily with the importance they placed elsewhere on the advanced capitalist countries.

As revolt continued throughout 1848, Marx and Engels got increasingly optimistic about the cause of Polish independence they had denied only the year previously.

Continuing from their viewpoint in chapter four of the *Manifesto*, Engels (1977c, 375) would write in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* that for Poland and ‘all Slav nations, the only possible form of liberation is agrarian revolution’. This was not seen as an isolated, national revolution, but as part of a broader revolutionary wave across Europe. In Marx’s (1977a, 375) own words,

[The] revolutionisation of Poland is inseparable from the independence of Poland. In Paris, Vienna, Berlin, Italy, Hungary, the Poles shared in the fighting in all the revolutions and revolutionary wars...because the liberation of Poland is inseparable from the revolution, because Pole and revolutionary have become synonymous, for Poles the sympathy of all Europe and the restoration of their nation are...certain’.

Poland, in less than a year, had gone from being a futile cause to a fundamental part of a broader European revolution. The Poles were now the ‘high-minded [*hochherzigen*] generals of the revolution’ (Marx 1977b, 499; 1982a, 454) and the success of their cause had importance outside of Polish borders. Marx and Engels would see a democratic Poland as a prerequisite to the establishment of a democratic Germany, a cause fundamental to their political upbringing (Engels 1977c). The centre of the revolutionary movement had seemingly swung around from industrial England to agrarian, feudal Poland.

This viewpoint began to be reflected in Marx and Engels’ foreign policy as they tried to distinguish themselves from mainstream German opinion by their support for the Poles. They would proudly note that ‘despite the patriotic shouting and beating of the drums of almost the entire German press, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* from the very first moment has sided with the Poles’ (Engels 1977b, 212). They would challenge the German liberals’ failure to ‘do something really decisive, to make a real sacrifice’ for Poland, mocking their ‘compassion’ which only existed ‘so long as it was a matter of dancing and drinking champagne for the benefit of the Poles’ (Engels 1977c, 344). They saw the revolutionary cause in Poland and Germany as mutually dependent on each other, and just as a Polish agrarian revolution would support revolution in Germany, the German revolutionaries should aid Poland.

In fact, Engels (1977a, 212; 2016b, 309) would argue that a failure to support Polish independence would actively harm the prospects for democracy in Germany. He claimed that reactionary forces in Germany were stoking anti-Polish and other chauvinist sentiment to ‘forge the weapon of suppression within the country [*die Waffe der innern Unterdrückung*] by calling forth a narrow-minded national hatred’. Germany could not be revolutionary if it did not support Poland and revolutionary movements outside of its own borders. With this in mind, Engels advocated for a highly interventionist foreign policy. While condemning military reaction in Germany, he would argue that

*A war against Russia would be a war of revolutionary Germany, a war by which she could cleanse herself of her past sins, could take courage, defeat her own autocrats, spread civilisation by the sacrifice of her own sons as becomes a people that is shaking off the chains of long, indolent slavery and make herself free within her borders by bringing liberation to those outside [*sich nach innen frei macht, indem es nach außen befreit*].*

The connection between Polish and German democracy in their view was not a passive one, but of active military support. Here the international cause of revolution appears as interconnected national struggles, and following this, national struggles were to advance through fulfilling broader, international objectives.

It is worth noting, however, that this perceived mutual relationship of Poland and Germany for their wider revolutionary aims was likely what led Marx and Engels to back the Polish cause in 1848 to begin with. Other national struggles, such as the Czech or Ruthenian, did not receive such praise or attention and Engels (1977b, 71; 2016e, 402) would write an editorial for the newspaper denying their support for national liberation struggles:

In a former issue, *La Concordia* expressed the opinion that the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* backs any group as long as it is ‘oppressed’. The paper was led to this not very sensible invention by our judgment of the events in Prague and our sympathy [*Teilnahme*] for the democratic forces [*Partei*] against the reactionary Windischgrätz and Co. Perhaps the Turin journal has become more enlightened in the meantime about the so-called *Czech* movement.

What drove Marx and Engels to reverse their opinion on Polish independence from 1847 was not a broader turn within their attitude to national struggles, but that they could see Poland as playing an significant role in revolutionary democratic struggles outside of its borders. The ‘Springtime of Nations’ of 1848 had undeniably led Marx and Engels to better integrate national struggles, and support for them, into their revolutionary politics. Unlike the previous year, it is far clearer to identify a foreign policy within their activism. There are, however, significant inconsistencies within this.

Throughout 1848 and the period building up to it, we can observe three lines of thought within how Marx and Engels approach foreign policy and internationalism from the perspective of revolutionary democracy or communism. The first perspective emphasises the class nature of capitalism and sees revolution as an international movement of the working class. Due to the uneven development of capitalism, both the mode of production itself and the associated proletariat are more advanced in England, and it is here the revolution will begin before spreading eastwards. This perspective has little need for a foreign policy of its own, and indeed, Marx counsels the Chartists to focus on domestic revolution, because emancipation could not be found through any other avenue. This applied to England and Poland alike.

This perspective is perhaps more understandable from a long-term perspective given Marx’s prediction about the decline of nation-states during the rise of world communism (see Rosdolsky 1965). Yet this struggles to be the only interpretive framework in a concrete situation, and especially the kind of situation Marx and Engels found themselves within during the ‘Springtime of Nations’ in 1848. Political events during this time in continental Europe were dominated by two trends: the democratisation of national states (France and Germany) and the unification or independence of national states (Poland, Italy, Czechia, Germany). They could not easily ignore either trend to focus on class. This required a focus on foreign policy and the national question, which the remaining two trends sought to address.

One of these, supporting national movements and agrarian revolution in Eastern Europe, was something with which Engels in particular was extremely inconsistent.

Compared to the Czechs and Ukrainians, for example, the Poles were quite privileged within Marx and Engels' foreign policy of the time. They both saw agrarian revolution and independence in Poland as useful political aims and championed them accordingly. This was a prerequisite for gaining their support for a national cause. Rosdolsky (1987, 30) summarises Engels' position in his study of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* and the national question in 1848 as follows:

[The] fact of national oppression by itself in no way obliges democrats to take up the cause of the nationality oppressed rather, this obligation arises only when the political actions of the nationality in question bear a revolutionary character'.

As justified in their own writings within the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, Marx and Engels saw Poland as being able to contribute to broader aims of revolution. This was perhaps because of either the British working class's 'Polonophilism' (see Weisser 1967), or their own friendship with Lelewel within the League of Communists. Regardless, Marx and Engels' foreign policy is incredibly inconsistent on this possibility both before and during the revolutions of 1848.

The last perspective within Marx and Engels' foreign policy during 1848 is focused on the development of a foreign policy appropriate for a revolutionary Germany. This is not necessarily separate from the previous given the significance of Germany for revolution in Europe as a whole. Indeed, as previously noted, Engels (1977c, 351) would back Polish independence as 'a primary condition for the creation of an independent Germany.' Yet they, arguing it would revolutionise Germany as well as the continent as a whole, envisaged a broader interventionist role for Germany aimed at spreading revolution across Central and Eastern Europe.

This aspect of their foreign policy poses significant questions for the meaning of the phrase 'united action of the leading civilised countries' (Marx and Engels 1976b, 503) within the *Communist Manifesto*. Marx suggests to the Chartists that the abolition of capitalism in England *domestically* will lead to the liberation of Poland. Engels, however, portrays the role of revolutionary powers with a much more active and interventionist foreign policy reminiscent of Trotsky's minority position within Soviet

debates of the 1920s. Marx or Engels could likely never provide a single answer to this question. To do this, one would need to know how to abolish global capitalism in its entirety.

These three perspectives, suggesting Poland would be liberated through either the end of capitalism in England, German invasion, or its own agrarian revolution highlight the contradictions of Marx and Engels' political thought, which was still in its early phases of development when the revolutions of 1848 required it to be put to the test. The journalistic structure of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in particular allowed Marx and Engels to posit different revolutionary democratic or communist approaches to the revolutionary crisis on a near-daily basis. There is no settled answer offered on what a revolutionary foreign policy looks like – or even if a foreign policy is necessary.

After the revolution's failure

The failure of the revolutions of 1848 to achieve not just Polish independence, but also social emancipation in Germany or France, led Marx and Engels to walk back their optimistic comments around agrarian revolution in Poland as a potential source of wider revolution. In the introduction of Marx's *Wage Labour and Capital* published in 1849, Marx (1977c, 198) returned to the 'socialist revolution first' approach expressed two years earlier. He wrote,

The desperate exertions of Poland...were the concentrated expressions of the European class struggle between bourgeoisie and working class, by means of which we proved that every revolutionary upheaval, however remote from the class struggle its goal may appear to be, must fail until the revolutionary working class is victorious, that every social reform remains a utopia until the proletarian revolution and feudalistic counter-revolution measure swords in a *world war*.

Even for a communist, this is a remarkably cynical passage – *every* social reform being a utopia under capitalism was far from Marx's usual position. Occasionally Marx is classified as a 'national nihilist' (Erlacher 2014, 528), an 'anti-patriot' (Löwy 1976, 82) etc. and it is after the failure of the 1848 national revolutions where this can be seen far more than any previous moment in his politics. Marx was not alone in this view,

however. As the situation calmed, similar cynical attitudes prevailed across the League of Communists. The social basis of the Polish uprising, and its possibility for social emancipation, was fundamentally questioned. It was explained as a cause that was, at best, controlled opposition. Another member of the League, Theodor Goetz (1982, 354), would argue in a letter to Marx that ‘since the noble bourgeoisie also wants to pay homage to the zeitgeist one day a year, they always keep a revolutionary fontanelle open. This used to be Poland.’ This attitude was not without reason. The slogan of the Polish national movement of the time was ‘Z szlachtą polską – polski Lud’ (With the Polish gentry are the Polish people; Blit 1971, 1). In many ways, the post-1848 sobering was a return to the pure ‘class’ position they had held previously.

The collapse of the League of Communists in the early years of this decade, and Marx’s retreat into the British Library for his economic research meant that neither man was politically active for the next decade. This meant which neither Marx nor Engels gave political commentary on the Polish question or much on the foreign policy of the workers’ movement more broadly within the 1850s. It is only within several pieces of correspondence where discussion can be found.

In these early years of the decade, not much would change in their attitudes towards Poland. Engels (1982a, 363) would remain with an entirely negative attitude towards the Polish question, reflecting in a letter to Marx that,

The more I think about it, the more obvious it becomes to me that the Poles are *une nation foutue* [a finished nation] who can only continue to serve a purpose until such time as Russia herself becomes caught up into the agrarian revolution. From that moment Poland will have absolutely no *raison d’être* any more. The Poles’ sole contribution to history has been to indulge in foolish pranks at once valiant and provocative.

He would add in an 1853 letter to Weydemeyer that ‘the restoration of Poland is synonymous with the restoration of the old ruling aristocracy, its powers unimpaired’ (Engels 1983, 306). On one level, this is a continuation of, or a reversion to, the rhetoric of the speeches and writings that Marx and Engels produced in 1847 rejecting the potential of the Polish national movement to the revolutionary movement. Yet both men

were at least in solidarity with Poland at that time, simply disagreeing that the source of Polish liberation could lie with nationalism. Here in the early 1850s Engels goes further and rejects *tout court* Poland itself. Rosdolsky's commentary on Engels's total subordination of any national struggle beneath broader revolutionary aims becomes even more striking on the Polish question when we observe how Engels could change his mind.

No similar statements can be found on Marx's part. The 1850s would be a quiet decade for him, as he largely passed his time within the British Library, estranged from the local working class movement. There is evidence Marx was not fully divorced from it, however, as in 1855 he attended a meeting in London convened in solidarity with Poland, writing on the scale of Chartist solidarity expressed within it for the *Neue Oder-Zeitung* (Marx 1980). The following year would be a decisive turning point for his position on Poland. Following study of his late comrade Lelewel's *Considérations sur l'état politique de l'ancienne Pologne et sur l'histoire de son peuple* and Mieroslawski's *De la nationalité polonaise dans l'équilibre européen*, Marx (1983, 85) would firmly change his mind and 'plump for Poland' as he noted in the letter to Engels quoted near this article. He continues in the letter by asking Engels for 'substantial sums' to help pay his bills, and the topic is not continued further. Nevertheless, this letter remains a turning point for Marx (and indirectly, Engels) on the Polish question and on revolutionary foreign policy more generally.

The idea that a revolution could have an 'external thermometer' is, I believe, fundamental to the full emergence of Marx and Engels' foreign policy that would follow in the 1860s and beyond. Previous conceptions of foreign policy, or something adjacent to it, had treated a revolutionary movement's foreign objectives from a functional perspective. Indeed, at times it did not seem to be valued at all. This position is in many ways the opposite of the earlier Engelsian conception that asked how foreign countries could benefit a revolution. Here Marx begins to see the duty of revolutionary movements to support struggles in foreign countries. While there are elements of this already present, within Engels' support for war on Russia in 1848 for example, he

argues for this primarily to strengthen German revolution. Foreign policy for the rest of Marx and Engels' political careers becomes a matter of principle alongside one of revolutionary tactics. In any case, Marx's political pivot in 1856 would take over a half a decade to bear fruit.

1863 and the First International

Poland would return as a pressing issue for Marx and Engels with the outbreak of the January Uprising of 1863 in the Russian-occupied Kingdom of Poland. Marx (1985d, 453), upon learning of the revolution, predicted its significance and wrote to Engels,

What do you think of the Polish business? This much is certain, the era of revolution has now fairly opened in Europe once more. And the general state of affairs is good. But the comfortable delusions with which we welcomed the revolutionary era before February 1848 have gone by the board.

As the Polish uprising continued, and drew in the European powers, Marx was drawn back into political activism. On 17 February 1863, he sought Engels' aide in writing a 'manifesto' on the Polish question (Marx 1985e, 455).

The Polish business and Prussia's intervention do indeed represent a combination that compels us to speak. Not in person... but the Workers' Society here would serve well for the purpose. A manifesto should be issued in *its* name, and issued *immediately*. You must write the *military* bit – i.e. on Germany's military and political interest in the restoration of Poland. I shall write the diplomatic bit.

They would also make plans to write a longer work addressing the same issues. The significance of this moment was two-fold. While Marx had continued to write throughout the 1850s, his output had primarily consisted of journalism and the beginning of his economic studies. This was a return to the political Marx concerned with issues of revolution in Europe, but it was equally a return to the political Marx who sought a role within the organisations of the workers' movement. For this, Marx had the support of Engels (1985b, 455), who had moved decisively away from his position on the Poles of the decade previous, noting to Marx that they 'are really splendid fellows'.

Marx (1985f, 461) eventually called off the publication of the joint work ‘as so to be able to see events when they have reached a rather more advanced stage’. Researchers later would uncover his manuscript on Poland written during this period, which was given the editorial title ‘*Polen, Preußen und Rußland*’ [Poland, Prussia, and Russia] and published with a similar text from the following year as *Manuskripte über die Polnische Frage* by the International Institute for Social History (IISG) in Amsterdam. Here Marx saw the creation of a democratic Poland as key to ending reactionary Prussian authority and the unification of Germany on a democratic basis. As he argued, ‘the Polish state is the negation of a Russian state as a state sheltering Prussia.’ (Marx 1961, 33). Simultaneously, Polish independence would mean ‘destruction of present-day [imperial] Russia [and] the ruling out of Russia’s candidacy to dominate the world.’ (Marx, 1961, 93).

While the longer work that Marx and Engels had planned went unfinished, the pamphlet for the German Workers’ Educational Society in London written by Marx (1984, 296-7) was published. Its argument follows similar themes,

The Polish question is the German question. Without an independent Poland there can be no independent and united Germany, no emancipation of Germany...the German working class owes it to the Poles, to foreign countries and to its own honour, to raise a loud protest against the German betrayal of Poland... It must inscribe the *Restoration of Poland* in letters of flame on its banner.

This was to be, overall, Marx and Engels’ foreign policy for the rest of their political activity. Elements, such as the equation between Polish and German struggles, link back to remarks previously discussed from 1848, although there is no direct continuity. This connection, reaffirmed by the ‘external thermometer’ turning point in Marx’s politics, was based on an analysis of the ‘Holy Alliance’, the conservative trio of monarchies including Germany that occupied Poland (Marx 1985a). The restoration of an independent Poland was a necessary component of defeating the reactionary Prussian force just as much as the Russian counterpart.

Concurrently to Marx's own response to the Polish uprising, a joint initiative of Londoner and Parisian workers in solidarity with Polish workers prompted broader dialogue between French and English labour leaders, who had a decades-long history of solidarity with Poland leading up to the January Uprising (Kutolowski 1966) and ultimately, the founding of the First International in 1864 the following year (Eichhoff 1985; Marchlewicz 2018). The First International, or IWMA, was not an ideologically or politically unified group, but rather a 'network of different European groups of workers and reformers' (Herres 2018, 301) which included British trade unionists, continental Proudhonists, Polish democrats, and others including Marx and Engels themselves.

Marx was not among those who initiated the founding of the IWMA, although he was invited to participate in the meeting that formally created the International as a representative of German workers, which he attended 'in a non-speaking capacity on the platform' (Marx 1987a, 16). Elected to the Provisional Committee and its operational Sub-Committee, Marx authored its programme, the 'Inaugural Address', and would go on to draft most statements and appeals of the IWMA (Herres 2018). His significant, though not exclusive, influence on the International would be through these avenues.

When investigating Marx and Engels' foreign policy during the period of the IWMA, there are two dimensions to it we must take into account that each reflect the two focuses of work carried out within it. Marx would describe the International as a 'community of action', within which the 'exchange of ideas' and 'direct discussions at the general congresses would...gradually create a common theoretical programme for the general workers' movement' (Marx 1988, 236). Foreign policy in the context of the IWMA operated on these two levels. Therefore, Marx both sought to shape the actions of the IWMA as a community operating outwards, and to develop the 'ideas, concepts and techniques' (Herres 2018, 303) of the workers' movement within its own structures.

From the beginning, there was dissent on the focus which the IWMA ought to give foreign policy, and to Poland in particular. During its founding, Victor Le Lubez,

one of the French members of the General Council and the man who invited Marx into the IWMA would worry that the International ‘might detract from our prestige if we so often engaging in demonstrations with regard to Poland’ instead of ‘resolving social problems and the extinction of pauperism’ (Pearlman and Belyakova 1962, 134). The issue re-emerged at the 1865 London Conference of the IWMA with Lu Lubez and other comrades opposing the direct mention of Poland’s reformation ‘on a democratic and social basis’ in the International’s documents. If it had to be included, they reasoned the organisation should be ‘affirming of the same principle, but on a broader...universal basis’. Lu Lubez’s proposal was rejected by 23 to 10 .

In this way, the First International entered existence affirming the need for an independent, socialist Poland. Yet unlike what Lu Lubez believed, the International was by no means only focused on Poland within matters of foreign policy. In the ‘Inaugural Address’ of the IWMA written by Marx and approved by the General Council, Marx (1985b, 13) would make perhaps the clearest statement he would ever give on a revolutionary foreign policy for the workers’ movement.

The shameless approval, mock sympathy, or idiotic indifference, with which the upper classes of Europe have witnessed the mountain fortress of the Caucasus falling a prey to, and heroic Poland being assassinated by, Russia; the immense and unresisted encroachments of that barbarous power, whose head is at St. Petersburg, and whose hands are in every Cabinet of Europe, have taught the working classes the duty to master themselves the mysteries of international politics; to watch the diplomatic acts of their respective Governments; to counteract them, if necessary, by all means in their power; when unable to prevent, to combine in simultaneous denunciations, and to vindicate the simple laws of morals and justice, which ought to govern the relations of private individuals, as the rules paramount of the intercourse of nations.

The fight for such a foreign policy forms part of the general struggle for the emancipation of the working classes.

The remarkable thing about this statement of Marx’s foreign policy is its attention to moral principle as well as practical action. Foreign policy was now no longer subordinated to the *Realpolitik* of the (German) revolutionary movement but was based open the ‘simple laws of morals and justice’. Chief among these was the right to

‘self-determination of nations’, [*droit des peuples de disposer d’eux-memes*] which Marx (1981b, 179; 1987c, 200) would proclaim in appeals for a democratic and social Poland. Engels would also adopt this view in his writings for the IWMA (1985b 157). The moral dimension of their foreign policy can be seen by their condemnation of the British government removing ‘Polish’ before refugees in the state budget, despite its lack of effect on the financial aid itself (Belyakova 1964, 226). Self-determination was more than a functional component of revolutionary strategy, it was a principle for the workers’ movement to defend.

Secondly, foreign policy for Marx during the First International was a matter of practical politics for the international workers’ movement. During a debate within the General Council, he emphasised that while ‘the working class was not strong enough to prevent annexation ... they could raise an opposition against their rulers’ (Belyakova 1967, 58). Indeed, particularly in its early years, the IWMA was active organising meetings and demonstrations in solidarity with Poland (Marchlewicz 2018, 182) just as it could organise practically in areas of labour internationalism (Delalande 2018).

Yet the General Council and Marx’s approach to Poland continued to be opposed by Lu Lubez and other continental sections of the IWMA, which were largely influenced by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. As well as a general opposition to states, Proudhon (1864) himself had recently declared a strong opposition to an independent Poland, arguing that the partition of Poland was legally valid and a historical necessity for European progress. It fell to Engels to debate the Proudhonist position, which prompted his series of articles, ‘What Have the Working Classes to Do with Poland?’ He would argue ‘the working men of Europe unanimously proclaim the restoration of Poland as a part and parcel of their foreign policy programme ...They mean intervention, not non-intervention; they mean war with Russia while Russia meddles with Poland’ (Engels 1985d, 152). The contrast between the foreign policy held by the Proudhonists and Marx/Engels was stark and led to one of the first major divisions of the IWMA.

In the Geneva Congress of the IWMA held in September 1866, the General Council led by Marx sought the International's backing for 'the reestablishment [*reconstitution*] of Poland upon a democratic basis' (Marx 1985c). Largely due to the opposition of Proudhonist French and Belgian delegates, this measure was rejected by the Congress delegates (Marchlewicz 2018; Ciołkosz 1965). From this point on, the Polish question ceased to hold a prominent role in the activity of the IWMA and its General Council.

Yet Marx, who was one of the most supportive members of the Polish cause on the General Council (Marchlewicz 2018), continued to champion an active and principled foreign policy, particularly on areas around Poland and the Russian Empire more broadly. He would continue to defend Polish independence, arguing that to do otherwise would be 'not Internationalism but simply prating submission' (Belyakova 1968, 198) Marx recommended, and welcomed, the Socialist-Democrats of Cracow into the International on this basis as its Polish section.

He also would continue to agitate against the Russian occupation and the Tsarist regime. In March of 1870, Marx became the representative of the newly admitted Russian section of the First International on their direct request (Belyakova 1966). In their programme, they called the Russian occupation of Poland a 'brake' [*tormoz*] on the social emancipation of both Russia and Poland (Marx 1966, 366). Marx agreed with this, but suggested they note that the Russian occupation of Poland gave 'pernicious support and real reason' for the existence of a military regime in Germany as well. He noted that the Russian socialists had 'the lofty task of destroying the military regime [in Germany]; that is essential as a precondition for the overall emancipation of the European proletariat' (Marx 1985i, 110). Marx was beginning to support the organisational practice of the interconnected nature of the continent's revolutionary movements that he had long recognised.

Placing an end to the Russian occupation of Poland and Tsarism more broadly would form an important part of Marx and Engels' foreign policy during this period. In a General Council debate in 1871, Engels would advocate, with Marx seconding, for

total trade sanctions against Russia until Poland regained its independence (Belyakova 1967, 166).

If the Russian aristocracy could not sell their corn, their flax, in one word, their agricultural produce to foreign countries, Russia could not hold out for a year...The working class has no property to lose, it therefore has no interest in making [it] safe. But the working class has interest in resuming the hold of this power and to keep [it] intact until the Russian Empire is dissolved...No other country can oppose Russia the same as England can and she must keep this power at least till Poland is restored’.

The relevance to contemporary foreign policy debates aside, what is remarkable about the political strategy advocated for here is both its hawkishness and its determination. Rather than have the working class movement sit on the sidelines of foreign policy, Engels (and Marx) would see the working class assert its influence on foreign policy – even that of the British Empire. Furthermore, they allege that *only* the working class can push for a necessary calibre of sanctions regime, given its disruption to property rights and economic norms of capitalism. Reminiscent of Engels’ advocacy of a revolutionary war with Russia in 1848, Marx and Engels would advocate a foreign policy that took the working class movement’s ability to ‘vindicate the simple laws of morals and justice’ seriously as a political force.

Overall, the Polish Uprising of 1863 and the founding of the IWMA in its wake had a remarkable impact on Marx and Engels’ foreign policy. Dealing with both the internal international relations of the workers’ movement and its collective foreign policy, the two men balanced, much more than they had previously, the relationship between national revolutions and international socialism. This occurred following Marx’s studies in 1863, within which the interconnected power structures of European reaction in Prussia, in Poland, in Russia, and Europe as a whole, were more deeply recognised. This meant that, based on the political principles of socialism, democracy *and self-determination*, Marx’s foreign policy could give a basis for the practical cooperation and action of the working-class movement on an international scale.

Tragically, the internal political heterogeneity of the First International meant Marx could not see this internationalism fully applied. Following the Hague Congress in 1872, these weaknesses would cause the IWMA to leave the historical stage altogether.

Final Years And Their Relations With Polish Marxists

In the last decades of Marx and Engels' lives, after the decline of the First International, the Polish question remained prominent as part of the broader question of revolution in Central and Eastern Europe. Marx and Engels continue to emphasise the importance of Poland to the German revolutionary movement. For example, Engels approached the issue in 1874 noting,

It is the German workers...more than any others, [who] have an interest in ridding ourselves of the Russian reaction and the Russian army. Moreover, in doing this we have only one reliable ally who will remain reliable in all circumstances: *the Polish people*.

In his view, Tsarist influence upon Germany meant that 'the sting [*Spitze*] is taken out of the entire German labour movement' (Engels 1989c, 10). This roadblock to revolution in Germany had to be addressed, and therefore the Poles, with their nationalist and anti-Russian sentiments, were a natural and useful ally of the German proletariat. This is not a new addition into Marx or Engels' politics.

The unique nature of this post- IWMA era is that this was also when Marx and Engels began to engage with the nascent Polish socialist movement. Socialism in Poland only arose during the years 1875-78 after the dissolution of the First International (Kurczweska 1981). Soon after, Marx's own ideas began to spread throughout Poland. According to one historian (Naimark 1979, 116), Polish socialists adopted Marx's 'materialist analysis of history' in the period 1877 to 1881, and by that year had come under Marx's influence in terms of their political organisation and programme.

This opened up new dimensions of foreign policy for Marx and Engels, who now could engage far more concretely with the Polish socialist movement. It is a historical irony that Marx found the new Polish Marxists, despite their otherwise total accord with

his politics, yet another group to disagree with him on the Polish question itself (Kurczweska 1981). It would take several decades for Poland itself to see widespread support for Polish independence. This arose long after Marx and Engels' deaths following the outbreak of World War One, when the social upheaval across Eastern Europe meant empires were in decline and independence was far more feasible than previously possible (Blanc 2017).

Unlike earlier generations of Polish nationalist revolutionaries, the Polish Marxists held the belief that the 'Polish nation meant only the solidarity of the historical stratum of gentry' (Kurczweska 1981, 57). The *Równość* [Equality] group of émigrés in Switzerland, the first stable organisation of Polish Marxism 'sought to banish forever from the socialist encomium the slogan "*Niech żyje Polska*" (Long Live Poland) and replace it with "Proletarians of the World Unite"' (Blit 1971, 28). They would go as far as to edit national objectives out of the Warsaw-written Programme of Polish Socialists when they published it in Geneva in 1878.

This disagreement at times generated open conflict between the Polish Marxists and their other European counterparts, whose foreign policy continued to place heavy influence on Polish independence (Naimark 1979). The first noticeable example of this was *Równość*'s 1880 international conference in Geneva convened to mark the 50th anniversary of the Polish uprising of 1830. Despite knowing the politics of *Równość*, the letter which Marx and Engels, along with Lafargue and Lessner, wrote greeting to the gathering openly praised the legacy of Polish revolutionary nationalists and, alongside their call for proletarian unity, ended with the slogan *Równość* had hoped to abolish – *Niech żyje Polska!* (Marx et al., 1989, 344-5).

This act prompted the open, if refrained, criticism of Ludwik Waryński, the lead founder of both the ideology and organisation of Polish Marxism. (Blit 1971). During a speech he would note (Naimark 1979, 98.),

Even the creators of the *Communist Manifesto* tie their eternal slogan 'Proletarians of the World, Unite!' with another slogan, 'Long live Poland!' which can also attract the bourgeoisie and the privileged

classes. This worship of and sympathy for Poland, Poland the oppressed and the oppressor, shows that in the views of its defenders, the old political combinations still maintain their meanings. They are gradually losing this significance, and one might expect that shortly they [Marx and Engels] will forget about them.

The debate continued at the International Socialist Congress held in 1881 in Chur, Switzerland which saw heated debate between Waryński and the pro-independence socialists led by Limanowski who had split from *Równość*. While the delegates ultimately resolved in Waryński's favour, passing a resolution stating that the 'struggle for emancipation is a struggle of classes, and not of nationalities' (Blit 1971, 46), the bitterness of the dispute sent shockwaves through European socialism.

Engels, who had previously backed Liebknecht on the pro-Polish independence stance of German Social Democracy, faced urgent letters from Bernstein and Kautsky to orientate the SPD on the Polish question after the conference closed. Engels (1991a, 192) would reaffirm the importance of national struggles to socialism, counselling Kautsky:

Every Polish peasant and [worker] who rouses himself out of his stupor to participate in the common interest is confronted first of all with the fact of national subjugation; that is the first obstacle he encounters everywhere. Its removal is the prime requirement for free and healthy development... To be able to fight, you must first have a terrain, light, air and elbow-room. Otherwise you never get further than chit chat.

To Engels (1991b, 193), Ireland and Poland were 'not only entitled but duty-bound to be national before they are international' and the international socialist movement as a whole should support these efforts in its own foreign policy. This pro-independence viewpoint entered into mainstream Polish socialism only with the formation of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) in 1892 (Blanc 2021) for whom Engels would arrange Polish translations of several of his earlier writings, including those on Poland from the time of the First International (Engels 2004). In the same year as the PPS' founding, his new preface to the 1892 Polish edition of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Engels 1990b, 274) repeated familiar conceptions of the importance of Polish independence for Polish and all European workers alike.

It is the historical irony of Marx and Engels' own position on Polish independence that, after they finally developed a consistent theory of how the Polish national struggle fit within the international revolutionary struggle and backed a foreign policy which supported it, they were opposed in this first by the Western Europeans and then by the Polish Marxists themselves. Yet in staying firm within his position while respecting the independence of the Polish socialists, Engels only highlights further the importance of self-determination to his own foreign policy. This principle, and the importance of the cooperation of Russian, Polish, and German workers which him and Marx emphasised, would become the majority position of the Second International by his final years.

Conclusion

While Poland decreased in importance for Marx and Engels during the First International and in the decades following it, the Polish question was an issue with which Marx and Engels had to grapple with from the 1840s to the 1890s. Understandably, this leads to a heterogeneity in their writings on the Polish question. This is particularly prominent in their writings before 1863, at which point Marx and Engels settled on a consistent approach to Poland.

Can their foreign policy, as one scholar (Macdonald 1941) has claimed, be seen to only treat Poland as a 'pawn of the European revolution'? Indeed, the European or international revolution is the frame of reference with which Marx and Engels try to address the Polish question. Yet this does not mean Poland is treated as a pawn just as much as it does not mean they should disregard international revolution, one of the defining features of their political thought and activity spanning across decades. The times in which Poland can be seen more or less as a pawn of revolution are limited to the 1840s and early 1850s, when Marx and Engels do not see Polish nationalism as having revolutionary potential. This can be found in the 1847 speeches on Poland, or Engels' correspondence.

Their far more consistently held position values and indeed praises the Polish revolutionary cause as not just significant for the Polish question, but as a movement which reverberates through the Russian Empire, through Germany, and Europe as a whole. It was the practical relationship and balance of responsibility between these different yet interlocking revolutionary movements that Marx and Engels sought to address in their foreign policy. In 1848, they saw the historical momentum for this as either laying within a domestic Polish agrarian revolution or an interventionist, revolutionary Germany that could emancipate all three countries. Starting with Marx's 'exterior thermometer' letter in 1856, and completely after 1863, this perspective matures significantly to value Polish independence and self-determination as a moral principle, and as a political movement to support and *cooperate* with alongside the German, Russian, and international organisations of the proletariat.

In doing so, Marx and Engels achieve a goal which they had set out for communism in the 1840s – the international working-class movement's rejection of nationality as an organising and strategic standpoint. Whether German, Russian, or Polish, the workers' movement can emancipate neither themselves, nor the others, upon their sole initiative. An internationalist foreign policy requires seeing various countries as part of a global political and economic web within capitalism and organising a similarly internationalist organisational framework for the cooperation and joint action of the proletariat.

Here Marx and Engels advance cooperation and mutual solidarity, but they also state just as clearly that this internationalism should not just exist on paper. If the working-class movement is not yet strong enough to materially influence a matter of foreign policy, so be it. In these cases, simply moral declarations and condemnations are enough. The working class must, however, find its own political voice and seek to reshape international relations on a principled, just basis. This, as the above passages have shown, is not pacifism by any means. Yet it is also different from Lenin's revolutionary defeatism, focused on bringing down one's own government. To be sure,

that remains within Marx and Engels' revolutionary politics. Yet they also go further than this by challenging the world socialist movement to find an active foreign policy.

So that the First International could address the Polish question, Marx and Engels emphasised that socialists have a unique ability to push for an assertive foreign policy that uses sanctions, expropriations, and similar tools to fight against reaction and imperialism internationally. This ability comes from socialists' (as members of the working class) ability to be genuinely anti-capitalist and challenge global capitalism and private property in political actions whether within domestic or foreign policy. At a time when the left has to grapple with not just US imperialism but irredentist Russia and resurgent authoritarianism more broadly, Marx and Engels' foreign policy deserves to be studied beyond the well-known slogans.

Chapter Three

Marx's Sociology of the Machine System and the Algorithms of Digital Platforms⁵

The rise of digital platforms such as Facebook, Uber, Alibaba, and Amazon within the global economy is undeniably changing the nature of work, education, commerce, and every other facet of socio-economic life. The scale of these transformations have led some scholars and activists to question whether our present economic system has changed in such a qualitative way to no longer count as capitalism, but some form of techno-feudalism (Geddes 2019; Dean 2020). These theories are based on the premise that 'history is simultaneously moving forwards technologically and backwards politically' (Waters 2020, 408) due to this economic shift. While idea of techno-feudalism is increasingly being subject to a critique (for example, Morozov 2022), the general question of how capitalism is developing remains open for debate.

This essay is an attempt to theorise further the nature of platform capitalism on the basis of Marx's original critique of the capitalist mode of production. Specifically, I argue that digital platforms can be seen as a modern, digital form of Marx's machine system *mutatis mutandis*. Key to the operation of digital platforms is their analysis and processing of data between end-users and the platform's internal backend. To drive this, digital platforms use (often proprietary) algorithms as a transmission mechanism to, from, and between their end-users.

⁵ An earlier version of this chapter is published in *Rethinking Marxism* 35(1) under the title 'The Machine System of Digital Labour Platforms and the Algorithm and Transmitting Mechanism'. It can be read at doi.org/10.1080/08935696.2022.2159718.

Just as the machine system of large-scale industrial capitalism created an objective organisation of production within which the worker was a mere appendage of the machine, this algorithmic machine system shapes a ‘cyber-proletariat’ (Dyer-Witherford 2015) working within platforms as moderators, gig workers, click workers, etc. who service and support the needs of the algorithm and its clients. Their labour is managed entirely by the same algorithms, from the provisioning of tasks to confirming their completion and, if it deems necessary, penalisation or dismissal.

This chapter begins with a presentation of how Marx (1990) understood the machine system and mechanisation of production within Chapter 15 of *Capital* vol. 1. I focus on two key parts of his analysis in this chapter: the triadic nature of the machine – motor mechanism, transmitting mechanism and working machine; and the development of mechanisation from manual labour to the machine system. The increasingly coordinated and interconnected technological network under the system of machines relies on this triad, as an increasing number of working machines must rely on a central driving force as the scale of production increases.

At the end of this section, I also briefly discuss Marx’s earlier elaboration of the machine system from the *Grundrisse* (1993), the ‘Fragment on Machines’. In this rough draft, Marx begins to discuss the consequences of the automation of production, but he has not yet grasped the importance of relative surplus value to capitalist production. Because of this, he expects the machine system to lead to the collapse of capitalism. This erroneous conception of Marx was abandoned by the time of *Capital*, which has more sophisticated analysis into the importance of relative surplus value and productive power.

The second section of this essay then introduces the concept of digital capitalism and the digital platform as a pivotal technology for capitalism’s actualisation in digital environments. I outline the place of platforms within capitalism and introduce several ways which platform firms can be classified based upon the existing literature. Next, the components of Marx’s theory of the machine system are revisited in the context of the platform with analysis of how the motive-power and working machine appear within the digital platform.

The third section continues from this by discussing the role of algorithms within digital platforms as transmitting mechanisms. The specific triadic nature of platform work, between the technology firm, the client, and the worker (Joyce 2020), means that algorithms function as a more complex, networked transmitting mechanism than the radial nature of Marx's original machine system within industrial capitalism. This section ends with discussion of the role of the algorithm in shaping workers into the 'living appendages' (Marx 1990, 548) of the algorithm as a 'hybrid machine/human computing arrangement' (Jones 2021, 32).

Through this movement from Marx, and implicitly, early industrial capitalism, to the digital platforms and algorithms of contemporary capitalism, the differences between the machines and factories of his day and the algorithmically networked, digital systems of the present will be clear. Of course, one does not need Marx to realise how the scientific and technological basis of capitalism has been repeatedly revolutionised. I argue, however, that the fundamental continuity within the logic of capitalism and the structure of the labour process must also be recognised.

Marx's Theory of Machinery in Capital

Marx devotes the lengthy Chapter 15 (13 in the *Dietz* German edition) of *Capital*, 'Machinery and Large-Scale Industry', to the impact of machinery and mechanisation on the production process. As Heinrich (2013) notes, this was not a great nor unique insight of itself. It is rather Marx's interpretations of mechanisation that are of interest. In this chapter, Marx seeks to surpass the 'crude' formulations of the mathematicians, engineers and English economists who, in their theories of the machine, went in circles defining the machine as a 'complicated tool' and the tool a 'simple machine' (Marx 1985, 449). To address this under-theorisation, the fifteenth chapter has an ambitious span, seeking to not just provide a generalised account of the machine in capitalism (similar to its earlier chapters), but also a historical account following the progression from simple tools to the machine system, its effects on the labour process, on workers themselves, and so on. While the conjuncture we seek to understand surpasses the historical and techno-mechanical epoch within which Marx worked, 'Machinery and

Large-Scale Industry’ contains several aspects that can be adapted for a study of the contemporary machine system.

Key to Marx’s theory of the machine itself is an understanding of the three components of the machine (as opposed to the simple tool). In his view, a machine has ‘three essentially different parts, the motor (*Bewegungsmaschine*), the transmitting mechanism (*Transmissionsmechanismus*) and finally the tool or working machine (*Workzeugmaschine; Arbeitsmaschine*)’ (Marx 2018, 393). The motor provides the ‘motive-power’ and acts as the ‘driving force of the mechanism as a whole’. Then, the transmitting mechanism ‘regulates the motion, changes its form where necessary, as for instance from linear to circular, and divides and distributes it amongst the working machines’ which then seize ‘on the object of labour and modifies it as desired’ (Marx 1990, 494). Using the motor and transmission mechanism to harness the working machine, the machine can therefore perform similar tasks to those manual workers had formerly completed with similar tools.

The advantage of machines over human labourers comes from the scalability of machine production. While the number of working tools a worker can use is limited by their own ‘bodily organs’ the machine can operate at a faster pace using ‘a combination of different tools’. These machines, thanks to the coordination of the motor and transmitting mechanism, can then be combined to have many machines all operating within a single production process. As he notes, ‘all the machines receive their impulses simultaneously, and in an equal degree, from the pulsations of the common prime mover, which are imparted to them by the transmitting mechanism’ (Marx 1990, 500). The production process is in this way mechanised through the *cooperation* of machines.

Yet Marx does not see the cooperation of machines itself as the end-point of the mechanisation of production. This position belongs to the ‘machine system’ created by a production process involving ‘graduated processes carried out by a chain of mutually complementary machines of various kinds’ (Marx 1990, 501). As a machine system develops, the coordination allowed by the transmitting mechanism becomes increasingly important to production (Marx 1990, 503). The coordinated system of

machines restructures the production process to be oriented around the necessary chain of machines to transform raw materials into the desired product.

This restructuring of the production process has significant effects on the role of labour within large-scale industry. The machine system creates an ‘entirely objective organisation of production’ which ‘confronts’ the worker as it is now the logic of the machine processes, rather than the workers’ subjectivity which shapes the labour process (Marx 1990, 508). Workers become the ‘living appendages’ (Marx 1990, 548) of the machine system, as labour is used to ‘aid’ (Marx 1990, 502) the movement of the machines where it cannot be fully automated. This is the basis of the real subsumption of labour. Despite machines being built by labour, they ‘take on the appearance of its masters’ (Marx 1990, 1055). Mau (2021, 35) correctly observes that Marx’s concept of power is not just attributed to individuals and class, but to ‘things and social forms’ such as machinery. Machines, through their fundamental position within large-scale industry, shape the role of labour and direct its activities within production.

This change of position within the labour process led Marx to view the nature of the worker itself as being transformed. In contrast to the ‘particularism’ (Starosta 2013, 239) of the wage-labour of manufacture, the machine system shapes a *universal worker* able to work anywhere within it. Yet this did not mean that capitalism would not discriminate in whom it would employ. Marx writes, ‘There appears, in the automatic factory, a tendency, to equalize and reduce to an identical level every kind of work that has to be done by the minders of the machines, in place of the artificially produced distinctions between the specialized workers; it is natural differences of age and sex that dominate’ (Marx 1990, 545). The de-skilling of labour simply means that capitalists are able to decrease variable capital expended through hiring from social groups that could be paid lower wages. In Marx’s day, this took the form of child labour, but this tendency of capitalism did not disappear with the passage of child labour laws.

An interesting small section of the chapter discusses the impact of this change in the demographics of labour on employment and the purchase of labour-power. Marx argues that ‘machinery also revolutionizes, and quite fundamentally, the agency through

which the capital-relation is formally mediated [*die formelle Vermittlung*] i.e. the contract between the worker and the capitalist. (Marx 1990, 519; 2018, 417). With their children being sent off to work, the worker themselves becomes a ‘slave-dealer’ (Marx 1990, 519) selling their child’s labour and receiving their wage as profit. For the purposes of this essay, the practice of child labour is not of importance itself. The most useful piece of analysis within this section today is Marx’s recognition that as capital seeks to employ different demographics to cut wage costs, the ‘formal mediation’ of the capital-relation, or in simpler terms, the form of the contract, also shifts to accommodate and expedite this process. We can see a similar shift today with the rise of contracting and ‘false self-employment’ (Thörnquist 2015; Kösters & Smits, 2020). It is not just labour itself, but the nature of how that labour gets to be performed, which is shaped by the needs of the machine system.

It is worth noting that Chapter 15 is not the first time in Marx’s economic writings where the concept of a machine system is introduced. In the ‘Fragment of Machines’ drafted during the winter of 1857-8 and published within the *Grundrisse* (Rough Draft) by the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute in Moscow during the Second World War, Marx (1993, 692) notes how ‘the means of labour passes through different metamorphoses, whose culmination is the *machine*, or rather, *an automatic system of machinery*... set in motion by an automation’. He observes the very visible tendency of the mechanisation of the process of capitalist production but is unable to justify it with the logic of capitalism – the production of surplus value.

Instead, Marx emphasises a perceived contradiction taken from the empirical evidence. He notes that ‘Direct labour and its quantity... is reduced ...compared to general scientific labour, technological application of natural sciences, on one side, and to the general productive force arising from social combination’. From this, he concludes that ‘Capital thus works towards its own dissolution as the form dominating production’ (Marx 1993, 700) due to the fact labour-time is no longer the measure of wealth. In other words, Marx believed that the automation of production would lead to the collapse of capitalism as a system of production.

In Chapter 15 of *Capital* Marx studies the same developments, that is, of the machine system, but is able to interpret these in the context of the production of relative surplus value. An increase in productive power leads to a reduction in the value of labour power and thus necessary labour-time. The role of science in ‘the service of capital’ within large-scale industry is seen as merely ‘completing’ this process of the development of the production of relative surplus value that begins with simple cooperation (Marx 1990, 482). For these reasons, I base my discussion of the algorithm as a machine system off Marx’s formulations within *Capital Vol. 1*, rather than his earlier, albeit still influential, interpretations from the *Grundrisse*.

This is not a full exposition of Marx’s theory of machinery, of course. Even within Chapter 15 he continues to talk about various related topics such as the Factory Acts, education of workers, the mechanisation of agriculture, and so on. These sections mostly deal with the effects of the machine system’s rise on not just industrial production but capitalist life as a whole. For the purposes of this essay, only the Marx’s theory of the machine and the rise of machine system are directly relevant. Using this, I seek to present the development of digital platforms and their role in within the circulation of capital by adapting Marx’s theory of the machine system.

The Rise of Digital Capitalism and the Platform

Production has only continued to increase its mechanisation and indeed, automation since Marx’s own day. Mirroring current discussions about the future of human work and its supposed abolition through technology (for example, Srnicek & Williams 2016; Bastani 2020), predictions of the automated factory and related social strife were also made in the 1930s, 1950s, and 1980s before its re-emergence in the post-digital 2010s (Benanav 2020; Jandrić & McLaren 2020). Now, rather than just machines further automating the factory, labour is confronted with an objective production system based upon big data and artificial intelligence.

Particularly within heterodox or Marxian literature, the term digital capitalism is often used to define this conjuncture. This shared vocabulary, as can often happen with more than one Marxist theorist, hides a disagreement around what it means for

capitalism to be digital. For Schiller (1999, xiv-vi), digital capitalism is a historical ‘epoch’ within which digital media form ‘the central production and control apparatus’ of a global capitalist market system. Pace, (2018, 262) however, argues that digital capitalism is ‘neither a structural totality nor a historical period’ but rather capitalism’s ‘complex actualization in digital processes’. A similar position is taken by Sadowski (2020, 50) who focuses on ‘the operations of capital...adapting to the digital age’ as well as Fuchs (2019, Chap. 5). This essay uses Pace’s definition as an operating principle, as I highlight how the role of systems of machinery within capitalist production is maintained despite a shift from physical to digital or informational production processes.

Given the broad nature of how digital technologies can be implemented within capitalism, much of the existing scholarship looking at digital capitalism has sought to supplement and specify it further. To achieve this, other adjectival ‘capitalisms’ such as surveillance capitalism (Zuboff 2019), bio-informational capitalism (Peters 2012), ID capitalism (Hicks 2020), and algorithmic capitalism (Bilić 2018) are often specified. I specifically look at *platform* capitalism in this essay, a field of analysis focusing on a type of digital, data-driven infrastructure known as the platform. Digital platforms are a particularly important area of digital capitalism to research due to their significance in all areas of our daily life. For example, we may connect with our friends on Twitter, study via Moodle, shop on eBay or Facebook Marketplace, and travel or work using Uber. Despite the different aim of each of these above platforms, they share the use of digital networking technologies and exchange of data to make a desired connection.

In *Platform Capitalism*, Srnicek (2017, 43) defines the platform ‘at the most general level, [as] digital infrastructures that enable two or more groups to interact. They therefore position themselves as intermediaries that bring together different users: customers, advertisers, service providers, producers, suppliers, and even physical objects’. This process relies on concentrating big data through their platform and processing it in a useful way for would-be users (Marciano, Nicta & Ramello 2020). Depending on the business model of a particular platform firm, this data is used in

various ways from delivering personalised advertisements to providing product recommendations.

These various operational structures have led to various attempts to classify digital platforms within political economy. The neatest of these comes from Boyer (2021), the Parisian *Régulation* theorist. He divides digital platform business models based on their source of profit: revenue from advertising and indirect marketing access to data collected from an immense number of users able to access the platform free of charge (e.g. Google or Facebook), and those who rely on margins from sales (e.g. Amazon or Uber). Microwork is absent from Boyer's analysis explicitly, although it could arguably be included as a modified form of the latter.

Sadowski (2020, 61) argues that platforms are 'new landlords' which function as rentiers through the conversion of utilities into 'services' to which they can charge for access rights. Other classification schemes for digital platforms tend to focus on the category of service provided. Gnisa (2019, 280-1) separates platforms into four categories: the gig economy platform, the microtask platform, the creative platform, and the social media platform. Similarly, Srnicek (2017, 49) delineates the platform firm into five different categories: the advertising platform; the cloud platform; the industrial platform; the product platform; and the lean platform. Among these are 'humans as a service' (Irani 2015; Prassel 2018) platforms that offer labour-power for hire on a flexible basis mediated through the platform.

As Langley & Layshon (2017, 13) note, this service-based model is not specifically focused on production, but rather a 'new form of digital economic circulation' aimed at selling access to services. Growth of the digital economy occurs largely through these avenues, focused on realising value through 'distributive forces' (Pfeiffer 2022, 141). Given the importance of promoting platform use, this business model has high 'pure costs of circulation' (Marx 1991, 403) which are counterbalanced by the scale of its operations and user base. In Vol. 2 of *Capital*, Marx writes that 'a machine, as the product of the machine-builder, is commodity capital for him, and as long as it persists in this form, it is neither fluid nor fixed capital. When sold to a manufacturer who puts it to use, it becomes a fixed component of a productive capital

(Marx 1992, 284). This is not the case in capital circuits within the platform economy. For the Big Tech firms that operate platforms, their machine system remains productive capital and does not enter into circulation. Access to the services this system provides is sold as commodity, often on a monthly or yearly basis

Despite these differences in how digital platforms act within the circulation of capital to machines in Marx's own day, I argue that digital platforms can be seen as a machine system of the 21st century. Given the significant technological advances that have occurred since the publication of *Capital*, it would be an oddity to see machines performing the same identical functions as in the 1860s. In fact, given the historicist presentation of the development of the machine system Marx provides in Chapter 15 of *Capital*, I would argue that Marx fully expected the technical and economic nature of the machine system to continue to develop. Digital labour platforms cannot be seen as the only contemporary machine system, yet they increasingly play a significant role in contemporary capitalism.

Contrary to this, Gnisa (2022, 219) argues that digital platforms cannot be seen in this manner due to the fact they do not engage in the immediate production process, but rather the 'coordination of producers'. He views platforms as 'allocative means of production' that allow for the allocation of tasks, resources, and capacities and therefore as 'fundamentally different' to the industrial machine system. In other words, because they do not participate in production themselves, but allocate the means necessary for it to occur, they perform a different role in the circulation of capital to the machine systems of industrial production discussed by Marx.

I would argue, however, that the machine system of large-scale industry also plays a fundamentally allocative role that allows for, and indeed requires, a specific form of labour performing tasks required to augment the machine system. In Marx's (1990, 508) own words, 'the co-operative character of the labour process is in this case a technical necessity dictated by the very nature of the instrument of labour'. The delocalised nature of digital networks simply changes the form of this co-operative character of labour in a way that preserves co-operation from a systemic perspective while seeming entirely individualised from the position of individual workers.

This contradictory character of platform labour is reconciled through the worker-oriented applications and websites that platforms operate. These, the platform's working machine, are the interface through which platform workers are able to access the machine system within which they work. One can drive around the city for hours and will not find a single passenger requesting an Uber unless one is registered and active as an Uber Driver. Furthermore, platforms such as Uber intentionally design their worker-facing apps to encourage drivers to work more, and for longer hours, than they may have otherwise planned (Vasudevan & Chan 2022). Depending on the situation, the app may display text such as 'SURGE PRICING' indicating a time-sensitive pay boost, 'ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO GO OFFLINE? Demand is very high in your area. Make more money, don't stop now!', and 'YOUR NEXT RIDER IS GOING TO BE AWESOME! Stay online to meet him.' (Rosenblat 2018. Figs 19-21). In this way, platforms' worker-facing apps, a digital form of the working machine, are still able to pressure workers into in a particular manner despite the supposed flexibility of gig work compared to industrial production.

The allocative functions of digital platforms allow labor power to be hired and labor to then be performed. Platform workers toil and are indirectly paid by the end users, the third party in the "triadic" work arrangement of digital-labor platforms. Yet the platforms play a more significant role in this process than just connecting parties, as the above messages from Uber highlight. Platform workers are not just directed by their clients but are also "subordinated" by the digital platform itself (Wood and Lehdonvirta 2021, 1369). While platforms play an allocative role, they are not neutral. Platforms' rentier business models give platforms the ability to appropriate the surplus labor of workers operating within them despite the fact no formal ties of employment exist.

Referring to Marx, digital-labor platforms have changed the "formal mediation" of the work arrangement to accommodate both their allocative role and the rentier business model. Many comparable features to platform work can be found in similar, more traditional though nonstandard "offline" work arrangements. In Table 1, I compare the characteristics of platform work with Kalleberg's (2016) work categorizations: day labor, temporary help agency, contract company, and self-

employment. Excluding platform work's classification as self-employment— one of the main challenges for both union and regulatory efforts—the main novelty of platform work can be seen as its use of an allocative machine system to facilitate the labor process on a global scale and with maximum levels of precarity.

Table 1. Characteristics of Non-Standard Work Arrangements.

| Type of Work Arrangement | <i>Dimensions of work arrangements</i> | | | | Who directs work? |
|---|--|--------------------------------------|--|---|-------------------|
| | Who is the <i>de jure</i> employer? | Who is the <i>de facto</i> employer? | Assumption of continued employment by <i>de jure</i> employer? | Assumption of continued employment by <i>de facto</i> employer? | |
| Day Labour | Organisation A | Organisation A | No | No | Organisation A |
| Temporary Help Agency | THA Agency | Organisation A | Sometimes | No | Organisation A |
| Contract Company | Contract Company | Organisation A | Yes | No | Contract Company |
| Independent, Contracting, Self-Employment | Self | Client(s) | Yes | No | Self |
| Platform Work | Self | Client(s) <i>through platform</i> | Yes | Assumption of access to platform | Algorithm |

Note. Adapted from “Nonstandard Employment Relations and Labour Market Inequality: Cross-national Patters”, by A. L. Kalleberg in G. Therborn (ed.), *Inequalities of the World*, (p.138), 2006, Verso. Copyright Arne L. Kalleberg, 2006.

Lying between the tech companies that operate platforms and their end users are the algorithms that connect these relatively small companies and their backends to the often globally distributed end users. These algorithms are the regulatory regime of digital platforms (Yeung 2018; Cristianini and Scantamburlo 2020; Ulbricht and Yeung 2022), and, using Marx's terminology, they function as the transmitting mechanism between the two. The next section therefore discusses the vital importance of the algorithm as transmitting mechanism for an understanding of the machine system of digital platforms.

The Algorithm as Transmitting Mechanism

To revisit Marx's (1990, 494) own formulations in *Capital*, the transmitting mechanism has both a form, 'fly-wheels, shafting, toothed wheels, pulleys, straps, ropes, bands, pinions and gearing', and a function; it 'regulates the motion, changes its form where necessary... and divides and distributes it'. Understanding the algorithm as a transmitting mechanism requires comparing the similar function, i.e. the algorithmic regulation mentioned in the previous section, and not the form, which stands in stark contrast to the Industrial Revolution-era machines described by Marx.

The digital platform's need to 'extract, analyse [and] use' data (Srnicek 2017, 88) places data itself as the form of the transmission mechanism. After all, all computer code from `print 'Hello World'` to the complex matrices that run Amazon Web Services is data. The novelty of the platform's algorithm as a transmitting mechanism is that it does not run in a radial fashion from a centralised factory control to individual work machines. Platform work involves 'triangular' or 'triadic' (Joyce 2020, 543) relations between the platform mediating the transaction, those being paid to work, and those paying for work. Because of this, the digital transmitting mechanism is dispersed around a network, connecting many end-users to both the central servers and other end-users. In this way, the mechanism ensures 'a top-down orchestration of bottom-up networking between producers and consumers' (Papadimitropoulos 2021, 250). This networking could not function without the algorithmic transmission of data.

This top-down transmission is not solely for connecting various parties such as Uber drivers and Uber riders, but also for ensuring the technology company itself benefits from the interaction. Algorithms function as normative tools, allowing the technology company to influence outcomes in service of its own business interests (Viljoen, Goldenfein & McGuigan 2021). The need for platform workers to be seen favourable by the algorithm's review criteria (accuracy, high user rating, etc.) leads to the proliferation of 'algorithmic lore'. This knowledge, which promises platform workers greater 'hits' and therefore work, simply teaches how to best fit a platform's organisational strategies and business model (Bishop 2020). In this way, the objective organisation of the platform machine shapes the nature of the labour process yet, unlike the industrial machine system, can do so subtly, using positive or negative sanctions to enforce a normative behaviour.

The platform machine system also is able to use algorithms to organise the labour process at a large scale, far beyond what one factory could achieve and with none of the face-to-face cooperation industrial production requires. The precarious nature of platform work means that platforms can employ 'just-in-time labour hire' (Vallas 2018, 48) whenever a client requires a task fulfilled. For gig platforms such as Uber, this can simply mean replacing a permanently employed taxi driver with Uber's 'pay by the ride' business model. Click-workers or micro-workers, however, face an even greater subordination as the 'living appendages' of the machine system. Just as Marx's workers only acted to support the industrial machines, these workers are tasked with simply supporting the algorithm where artificial intelligence cannot act alone. In typical corporate-speak, Amazon calls this a 'hybrid machine/human computing arrangement' (Jones 2021, 32). The domination of the platform machine system is so totalising that clients know nothing about who is working within it for them, just as they are often unaware of the purpose or end-use of their tasks (Tubaro, Casilli & Coville 2020, 10). Workers are only brought into the system to augment and support the functioning of the platform and appear, to clients on the other side, below rather than alongside the algorithm.

The algorithm also operates as a reverse transmission mechanism, feeding information about its workers back into the system. For example, Uber tracks a wide range of information relating to driver behaviour and telematics, gathering data on how drivers are braking, accelerating, speeding (Rosenblat 2018, 139). Jamil (2020, 241) has dubbed this surveillance system an ‘algoticon’, where the ‘all-seeing’ algorithm replaces the central watchtower of the physical, traditional panopticon. The lack of formal employment protections means that platform companies face very little restriction as to the disciplinary use of this data. This control mechanism is reinforced using ‘compliance’ based agreements such as a EULA, an end-user licencing agreement, rather than an employment contract (Sadowski 2020, 56). Based on the ‘objective pretenses’ of the algorithm (Jones 2021, 52), data such as client satisfaction can be used to restrict or close worker accounts, preventing them from working within the platform further. Similar to the gig economy of early industrial capitalism (see Holgate 2021), the gig economy of platform capitalism provides precarious, insecure work, except now, even the supervisory functions can be brought within the machine system itself.

This unprotected, insecure form of labour leads to a significant growth in the relative surplus population. Dyer-Witherford (2015, 188-9) notes how the expansion of the platform economy creates the ‘moving contradiction of the induction of the global population through networked production and their redundancy through algorithms’. Platform workers are part of the ‘floating surplus population’ (Marx 1990, 794) able to intermittently work on platforms with no promise the continued availability of work. This is highlighted in reality by research showing that those in standard employment are less likely to do platform work than precarious workers. Furthermore, 22% of platform workers had no other form of employment or work outside of digital platforms. (Piasna, Zwysen & Drahoukoupil 2022, 35). The nature of the algorithm allows for both a rise in the relative surplus population and, when needed, temporary work to complete tasks that the algorithm cannot achieve on its own.

Conclusion

Unlike the beginning chapters of *Capital*, Marx's discussion of machinery and the capitalist mode of production has a clear sense of historical movement. Chapter 15 follows the increased mechanisation of the labour process from manual labour using simple tools or instruments, through increased complexity of individual machines able to replace these tools to the machine system of the factory. As this process happens, the machines confront the worker as the objective process and condition of production. Labour becomes increasingly pigeonholed, supplementing machinery where technology finds itself unable to operate autonomously.

This movement of increased mechanisation and indeed, automation, of production has only intensified since Marx's passing with the rise of electronic, microelectronic, and digital technologies within the process of production as well as everyday life more broadly. Rather than leading to the shortening of the working day and other beneficial changes that could arise from the great increase in productive power, digitisation has enabled an immense expansion of the machine system. Labour can be coordinated by machines in the interest of capital not just within one plant but worldwide, with clickworkers and gig workers from the Philippines to Portugal all working on or perhaps more accurately, within the same platforms. This expansion of the machine system has also led to the rapid expansion of the relative surplus population and the deskilled, insecure work that Marx discussed from Victorian England to encompass the significant majority of the world's population.

Recognition of the comparability between Marx's analysis of the machine system of production that the contemporary algorithmically regulated platform economy is important not just for analysis and critique of present-day capitalism, but also attempts to challenge its foundations and achieve socialist transformation. Important questions of political strategy remain, for example, can the heavily atomised platform proletariat still form a 'class-for-itself' and act as a political movement? Yet recognition of the fundamentally capitalist nature of the digital, platform economy allows for the potential of a revitalised workers' movement and a socialist strategy for the 21st century in a way that theories such as that of 'techno-feudalism' seeking to separate the present conjuncture from the capitalist mode of production are unable to

achieve. This, while not easily charting a path forward, at the very least allows us to know where we are standing.

Conclusion

The Opportunities of Marx's Challenges after the *MEGA*²

These three chapters, essentially vignettes into the theoretical and political development of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, highlight the diversity of their thought, both across different subjects and through time. This is facilitated through, and would have been impossible to expose to a comparable extent, the use of recently or relatively recently published materials from the *MECW* and in particular, the *MEGA*². These materials go beyond the 'classics' such as *Capital* or the *Manifesto*, which are still essential for a study into Marx's social thought, and include speeches, letters, drafts, and even Marx's reading notes of texts by other authors. It also includes articles from the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* which have only had their authorship confirmed in the *MEGA*² within the last decade. While this should not be over-exaggerated as revelatory for study of Marx or Engels, they are very valuable for researching the more ephemeral components of their social thought. In other words, these smaller, forgotten texts bring out the contexts of the political and theoretical terrain Marx and Engels were operating on.

In the context of Marx's political economic manuscripts in preparation for *Capital*, they highlight important developments in how Marx approached theoretical concerns such as the rise in automation. Marx's earlier prognosis that the increase in automation would lead to the self-dissolution of the capitalist mode of production was not simply an erroneous economic view, but a highly significant political position. After all, the working class movement then, as now, was faced with rising automation of production and society as a whole. Should this be seen as post-capitalist, or as a

fundamental part of industrial capitalism? Marx's theory of the machine system leads to very different *practical* political observations as well as theoretical.

They also highlight the difficulty for Marx and Engels of precisely locating the working class as a revolutionary subject. As previously discussed, Marx had realised this by 1844, and around the same time, Engels began intensive study of the sociology of the British workers' movement. Their thoughts on this quickly developed from Marx's (1975a, 187) initial recognition that 'the head of this emancipation is philosophy, its heart is the proletariat' to their famous appeal, 'Workers' of the World, Unite!' found both from the *Manifesto* to the First International and beyond. This rests at the heart of Marx and Engels' conception of society and social transformation.

Much of the political and theoretical challenges they faced followed from this, as the task of both locating and organising the proletariat was much greater than written declarations of this political principle. As the first chapter showed, a significant task the two men faced during the 1840s was simply to stake the proletariat as the accepted basis of the socialist movement against the various petty bourgeois and non-proletarian tendencies found within early socialism. Until the Revolutions of 1848 this was the main task of Marx and Engels' social and political theory. They highlighted the various forms of workers' movements seen in England and in Europe, their successes and shortcomings, and began to develop how the working class could achieve both democracy and then socialism by its own means.

Yet Marx and Engels quickly discovered the obstacles faced by the working class in living up to this revolutionary goal to which they had bestowed upon them. These included both external opponents of the working-class, such as the Junkers or the National Guard that quelled the June Revolution in France. Because of their political nature, these groups and their representatives could be easily identified by Marx and Engels, and indeed, by many other socialists of a less theoretical bent too. The language Marx uses to describe these is noticeably more political than sociological, with terms such as "reaction" and "counter-revolution" sitting alongside and giving a political reference to sociological categories such as the "high bourgeoisie" (Marx 2016a, 81). Outside of the most notable theoretical works, such as *Capital* or other economic

manuscripts, the political nature of Marx and Engels' social theory becomes much more visible.

As contemporary Marx scholars such as Musto (2020), Kurz (2018), and Johnson (2022) have highlighted, contemporary Marx scholarship must recognise the diverse, fragmented and even contradictory nature of Marx and Engels' social thought. When Marx is dealing with more political economic questions, such as the rate of profit, this self-questioning can be quite dry. Of course, as has previously been discussed with the theory of the machine system, these seemingly obscure, technical debates can have significant political consequences.

Yet the tendency found within Marx and Engels' works to always remain critical of their own previous assumptions and beliefs can be found clearly within their practical political writings. As the socio-political situation shifted, the two men revised their previous assumptions and adapted their political perspective, often after much introspection and serious study, to match. Perhaps nowhere is this clearer than in regards to Poland, where, at various points in time, Marx and Engels' political stances range from slight differences to full incompatibility. They believe that revolution can only occur in England, that a revolutionary Germany should spread liberation militarily, that a revolution in Poland supports the revolution in the West and is therefore useful, and ultimately, that independence and self-determination are important enough causes to support regardless.

This should not be taken to imply that Marx or Engels' social thought was built on flimsy ground or changed depending on the day. As can be seen with the Polish example, it took years, considerable study, and debates with other activists and social democrats for their positions to develop. The value of understanding this is to challenge the Social Democratic and Soviet conceptions of one 'Marxist' perspective and social theory. The eponymous person held different positions in different contexts. Rather than seeking to artificially boost one to support a party line, one of the advantages of contemporary research into Marx and Engels is that it can be more comfortable in this diversity.

With this in mind, Carver's view that the *MEGA*²'s neutral or apolitical approach to 'thought' of Marx and Engels can be brought into question. Of course, the editors take a very different approach to their earlier counterparts in the Soviet Union or GDR who edited the earlier volumes of both the *MEGA*² and the various collected works. One no longer finds reference to the theory of peaceful coexistence and other Soviet constructions in the prefixes, as previously occurred. Rather, the presentation of Marx and Engels' writings in this comprehensive form, regardless of the size or significance of the document, allows for readers and scholars to trace the development of Marx and Engels' social, political, and theoretical ideas across text and genre for how they really stood.

Althusser's quip that the difficulty of interpreting Marx comes partially from the difficulty of discussing how he discovers what he is going to forget in this way also applies to contemporary readers of Marx who take up the challenge of navigating – or even reading, as the *MEGA*² is a multilingual edition – Marx and Engels' collected writing. With this longitudinal perspective, we too discover components of Marx's social theory which we must also forget, at least in practice, to borrow other components for our own sociological or political analysis. One cannot see the platform economy as both non-capitalist and a capitalist machine system simultaneously. Similarly, if Poland is to be of inspiration for analysis of contemporary geopolitical questions, should we back independence or not? To discover Marx's insights, we must forget other pieces. For Marxist social science as well as political thought, this ability to discover Marx ourselves and select what we discover for ourselves, opens up new avenues for undogmatic expansion. Just as Marx approached the social world critically, new editions offer the same for Marx.

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