

## Engels' Reviews of *Capital Volume I*

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Paper presented at the annual conference of the Political Studies Association, Brighton 2016

### Introduction

In 1867 and 1868 Friedrich Engels made a concerted attempt to promote and publicize Karl Marx's newly-published *Capital Volume One* by means of a range of reviews written either anonymously or under the guises of consenting others. Some of these reviews were published while others were greeted with editorial rejection. What is most significant about the reviews is not the limited impact they had at the time, but rather the waste of time they involved. This paper will suggest that Marx, as much as Engels, was ultimately responsible for both their content and the efforts that were invested in them—efforts that could instead have been expended on better means of promoting the book. This could have helped avoid the development of the unwarranted reputation that *Capital* came to have for being not only a work of scientific socialism of the sort that Engels would later offer, but, moreover, a very dry presentation of such, from which all but the most learned readers should steer clear. Engels himself gave the impression in some of his own later works that they and those of Marx were interchangeable, but that his own were more readable.<sup>1</sup> Marx and Engels' disciple Karl Kautsky also did much to cultivate that view. Nevertheless, it was Marx who had inadvertently allowed this process to be set in train.

The view that Marx offered a theory of scientific socialism similar to that of Engels has of course been called into question.<sup>2</sup> Unlike natural science, the revolutionary social science one finds in *Capital* does not and cannot simply repudiate other theories of the phenomenon or process under study. This is because the theories themselves contribute to that which is under study. If the theories are repudiated this means that the realities of which they are a part need to be changed because of their inherent contradictions.<sup>3</sup> The theory of scientific socialism as extendable to the natural sciences is nowhere to be seen in *Capital Volume One*. It is, indeed, a book with a particular social scientific method rather than a book about a method—the book uses such a method rather than presents one. As such it is, potentially, far more appealing to a relatively wide readership than is often portrayed.

Engels' portrayal of Marx's theory was hugely influential and this is of significance for the argument of the present paper—that the reputation of *Capital* as being too tedious for the uninitiated might have been avoided. Whilst Engels' over-emphatic focus on science in some of the reviews would have reached only a narrow readership, he was nevertheless

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<sup>1</sup> Terrell Carver, *Marx and Engels: The Intellectual Relationship* (Brighton, Wheatsheaf Books, 1983), pp. 118-158.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Thomas, 'Marx and Science', *Political Studies*, 24 (1), 1976; Terrell Carver, 'Marx, Engels and Dialectics', *Political Studies*, 28 (3), 1980.

<sup>3</sup> Roy Edgley, 'Marx's Revolutionary Science', in John Mepham and David-Hillel Ruben (eds), *Issues in Marxist Philosophy, Vol. III, Epistemology, Science, Ideology*, (Brighton: the Harvester Press, 1979), pp. 23-24.

beginning to convince himself and others that his own views on the application of the dialectic to the natural sciences and mathematics could be found in the book. Those readers of *Capital* who, influenced by Engels' subsequent interpretation of Marx's work, were wary of tackling Volume One as a complex scientific text would have been even more confused as they read through it carefully trying to find such a theory. 'In the analysis of economic forms', Marx had, indeed written in the Preface, 'neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of use'. 'The force of abstraction', he went on, 'must replace both.'<sup>4</sup> He clearly wanted to distinguish the methods of social and natural science from one another.

A very different reputation might have been cultivated had Marx and Engels not focused so much time and energy on Engels' reviews, written mostly from a detached bourgeois perspective. A focus, rather, on some very readable, stylistic and potentially influential arguments and features of the book could have helped make *Capital* a far more popular book. Instead, in one of the reviews—one that was never published—Engels discussed in great detail a part of the original first chapter (which became Chapter Three in editions after the first): 'Money, or the Circulation of Commodities'.<sup>5</sup> As David Harvey suggests in his *Companion to Marx's Capital*, by the end of that chapter many readers have given up trying to get to grips with the book.<sup>6</sup> Marx was actually aware that it was a dry and difficult chapter. Nevertheless, closer attention by him to the content of this review, to which we will return later, to the others that Engels produced, and also to some of the latter writer's advice, could, it will be suggested in what follows, have been crucial to the painting of a very different picture. This would have meant that the unwarranted reputation of the book may well have been avoided.

### **The unwarranted reputation of *Capital***

In an article of 1967, written to mark the one hundredth anniversary of publication of the first volume of *Capital*, Thomas Sowell noted that this was a work that was 'almost as little understood today as it has ever been'.<sup>7</sup> Two years earlier Bertram D. Wolfe, who had previously been a supporter of communism and Marxism but was now a staunch opponent, described *Capital* similarly as Marx's 'unread and for many unreadable, masterpiece...'.<sup>8</sup> From their positions as the most prominent and influential Marxists of the late nineteenth century Engels and Kautsky each, in their own manner, paved the way for this unfortunate reputation as they steered newcomers to their ideology away from *Capital* and towards their own works. In a pamphlet of 1899 about the life and work of Engels, Kautsky stated that 'while complaints are made about the unintelligibility of Marx, and most people have read more about "Capital" than they have of "Capital" itself, Engels stands as a master of popular

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<sup>4</sup> Karl Marx, '*Capital*, Volume 1', in *MECW*, Vol. 35 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1996), p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Engels, Review of Volume One of *Capital* for the *Fortnightly Review*, in *MECW*, Vol. 20 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985), pp. 238-59.

<sup>6</sup> David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx's Capital* (London: Verso, 2010), p. 83.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Sowell, 'Marx's *Capital* After One Hundred Years', *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, 33 (1), 1967, p. 50.

<sup>8</sup> Bertram D. Wolfe, *Marxism: 100 Years in the Life of a Doctrine* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1967), p. xi.

exposition...'.<sup>9</sup> Engels hardly discouraged this promotion of his own work or the portrayal of that of Marx as too difficult for most readers. In a letter to his communist comrade Friedrich Adolph Sorge in the United States Engels said in 1882 that his own short pamphlet *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, which he had in fact helped Marx's son in law Paul Lafargue to publish in French two years earlier, was having a rapid effect on its readers that *Capital* could not achieve given that most people were 'too lazy to read' such 'stout tomes'.<sup>10</sup> In the 'Special Introduction to the English Edition' of *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* in 1892 Engels was able to boast that, including the English edition, 'this little book' was circulating in ten languages. 'I am', he went on, 'not aware that any other socialist work, not even our *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 or Marx's *Capital*, has been so often translated.'<sup>11</sup>

Like Kautsky, Georgi Plekhanov, who had come to be known as the father of Russian Marxism, contributed to the image that was being cultivated of Engels, rather than Marx, as the author whose work should be consulted by those seeking to gain a firm understanding of the theories they had conceived. In his influential essay *Fundamental Problems of Marxism* of 1908 Plekhanov stated that the 'definitive form' assumed by the views of Marx and Engels was fully expounded in Engels' *Anti-Dühring*, even though this was in 'in a somewhat polemical way'. Plekhanov added that a 'short but brilliant' account of the ideas that formed the philosophical basis of the partners' views could be found in the preface to the English edition of *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*. Only after promoting Engels' contribution to Marxism in this way did he turn briefly to Marx of whom he wrote: 'I may mention as of great importance to the understanding of the philosophical aspects of his teaching' first, the preface to the second edition of *Capital* Volume I, and second 'various remarks made in the course of the same volume'.<sup>12</sup>

This impression of Engels having a key role in clarifying theories of Marx which were brilliant but, supposedly, perhaps rather too difficult for a mass readership was shored up by V.I. Lenin in 'The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism', which he published in 1913. Although Lenin offered a concise, supportive summary of *Capital* it is his very general statement on the sources in which readers could find the views of Marx and Engels that stands out in that short essay. Those views are, he suggested, 'most clearly and fully expounded in the works of Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach* and *Anti-Dühring*, which, like the *Communist Manifesto*, are handbooks for every class-conscious worker'.<sup>13</sup> Lenin was thus, along with the other giants of classical Marxism—Engels, Kautsky and Plekhanov—directly or otherwise shaping the reputation of *Capital* as a difficult work that should be circumvented

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<sup>9</sup> Karl Kautsky, *Frederick Engels: His Life, His Work and His Writings* (Chicago: Charles H Kerr and Company, 1899), p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> Friedrich Engels, 'Engels to Friedrich Adolph Sorge, 9 November 1882', in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Collected Works (MECW)*, Vol. 46 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1992), p. 369.

<sup>11</sup> Friedrich Engels, 'Introduction to the English Edition (1892) of *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*', in *MECW*, Vol. 27 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), p. 281.

<sup>12</sup> Georgi Plekhanov, *Fundamental Problems of Marxism*, second edition (London: Martin Lawrence, nd), p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> V.I. Lenin, 'The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism', in V.I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, Vol 1 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1947), p. 60.

by those who wanted to gain an understanding of the work of Marx. Such readers should instead, it was implied, turn to Engels.

It would of course be misleading to suggest that any of the three volumes of *Capital* are easy works to casually pick up, read and fully comprehend. Indeed, it is not for nothing that Ben Fine and Alfredo Saad-Filho state that the purpose of their introductory guide to Marx's *Capital* is 'to provide as simple and concise an exposition of Marx's political economy as the complexity of his ideas allows'.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, at the hands of the classical Marxists and, as we shall see, Marx himself, the first volume did develop a reputation that was unnecessarily fearsome. Generations of Marxists who have, hence, been put off from tackling the first volume of *Capital* have missed a book which is far more readable, and even entertaining, than they would have expected. Indeed, as Harvey suggests in *A Companion to Marx's Capital*, it is 'astonishingly rich' and an 'astonishingly good book, just as a book'. 'Shakespeare, the Greeks, Faust, Balzac, Shelley, fairy tales, werewolves, vampires and poetry', he goes on, 'all turn up on its pages alongside innumerable political economists, philosophers, anthropologists, journalists and political theorists.' It is thus 'a rich and multidimensional text'.<sup>15</sup>

Such qualities are sorely absent from Marxist works produced by writers such as Kautsky who sought to popularize the ideas that Marx's presented in that text.<sup>16</sup> Engels' reviews likewise failed to capture the multidimensional character of *Capital* Volume One. Having consulted those of the reviews that were published, readers may indeed have expected to find such a work as would later be portrayed by Engels, Kautsky, Plekhanov and Lenin. By means of his published writings Engels played a key role in the way this portrayal gradually unfolded. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, Marx ultimately, must share the responsibility. This is because of some hasty and ill-judged decisions and tactics regarding the reviews and other ways to publicize the book.

In fairness to Marx we should remember his circumstances during the crucial years of 1867 and 1868 when the hasty and ill-judged decision were made. He was in considerable pain and discomfort from his now legendary carbuncles, his daughters were ill, he was in financial difficulty and the problematic International Workingmen's Association (First International) demanded his time and attention. Although he can therefore to a significant degree be excused, it is still the case that the opportunity for reviews and other material to flag the richer and potentially more popular dimensions of *Capital* was sorely missed. 'Marxism as a mass political movement', according to Engels' biographer Tristram Hunt, 'begins not with *Das Kapital* or the ill-fated First International, but with Engels's voluminous pamphlets and propaganda of the 1880s.'<sup>17</sup> This is indeed very true; but with better publicity

<sup>14</sup> Ben Fine and Alfredo Saad-Filho, *Marx's Capital*, fifth edition (London: Pluto Press, 2010), p. xiii.

<sup>15</sup> Harvey, *Companion to Marx's Capital*, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> A classic example of such popular expositions of Marx's work was Karl Kautsky, *The Economic Doctrines of Karl Marx* (London: A.C. Black Ltd: London, 1936).

<sup>17</sup> Tristram Hunt, *The Frock-Coated Communist: The Life and Times of the Original Champagne Socialist* (London: Penguin, 2010), p. 282.

the mass movement may well have begun with *Capital* Volume One and, perhaps, have thus taken a very different course.

### Missed Opportunities

When *Capital* Volume One was published in September 1867 Marx was aware that reading the huge book might prove a daunting task for many. He indicated in the preface that there was a danger that the early chapters would not exactly encourage any but the committed reader to persevere. ‘I presuppose, of course,’ he declared, ‘a reader who is willing to learn something new and therefore to think for himself’.<sup>18</sup> He had, hence, already begun to give some thought about how to attract a wider readership. This is evident from a letter he sent to his First International colleague Ludwig Kugelmann three months later. ‘Please be so kind as to tell your good wife’, Marx requested of Kugelmann, referring to Gertruda Kugelmann, ‘that the chapters on the “Working Day”, “Cooperation, Division of Labour and Machinery”, and finally on “Primitive Accumulation” are the most immediately readable.’<sup>19</sup> ‘Cooperation, Division of Labour and Machinery’ actually refers to material that was divided into three chapters in the later editions which are nearly always the ones read today: (13) ‘Cooperation’; (14) ‘Division of Labour and Manufacture’; and (15) ‘Machinery and Modern Industry’.<sup>20</sup> Together, these three chapters along with the other two he recommended—‘The Working Day’ and ‘The Secret of Primitive Accumulation’ (Chapters 10 and 26 in editions after the first)—amount to just under one-third of the volume. Marx was not, therefore, pinpointing minor elements of the book and taking them out of context. His attention was clearly to offer guidance for the purpose of encouraging people to actually read the book, and these chapters are certainly not only crucial but, moreover, some of the easiest to follow and comprehend. Two of these chapters have indeed become the most widely read. As Terrell Carver has commented, the reputation of *Capital* as a very dry and difficult work began to grow and the uninitiated have generally been directed to the empirical and historical chapters that would become chapters 15 and 26 in editions after the first.<sup>21</sup> Engels’ reviews of *Capital* would indeed have benefited from some attention to the second of these chapters, on primitive accumulation, as in it one finds a concise presentation of the emergence of capitalism. Marx tears apart the mainstream portrayal of this emergence as an idyllic process set in train by the actions of the diligent, intelligent and frugal people who prospered while the lazy and riotous ones ended up with only their labour to sell. He then discusses the actual process as one of expropriation and exploitation. To people who had read the *Communist Manifesto* this chapter could have been presented as a key lynchpin between that pamphlet and *Capital* Volume One. Of course, one must remember that the purpose of the majority of the reviews was to entice opponents into a debate and that this attempt was unsuccessful anyway. Nevertheless, this chapter could have been discussed in other material with the aim of promoting *Capital* had the time been spent more productively.

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<sup>18</sup> Marx, ‘*Capital*, Volume 1’, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> Karl Marx, ‘Marx to Ludwig Kugelmann, 30 November 1867’, in *MECW*, Vol. 42 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1987), p. 490.

<sup>20</sup> Marx, ‘*Capital*, Volume 1’, pp. 341-508.

<sup>21</sup> Terrell Carver, *The Postmodern Marx* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 15.

If the material that became Chapter 26 was thus potentially very marketable, that which now comprises Chapter 10—‘The Working Day’—is at least equally so. Nevertheless, that chapter was not publicised to the extent that Marx and Engels clearly considered worthwhile. Indeed, Engels hoped his comrade Hermann Meyer of the First International in the United States would be able to bring *Capital* to the German–American press and the American workers. ‘With the 8-hour agitation that is in progress in America now’, Engels thus opined in October 1867, ‘this book with its chapter on the working day will come at just the right time for you over there, and, in other respects too, it is likely to clarify people’s minds on a variety of issues.’<sup>22</sup>

One thing which people in the labour movements of the United States and other countries may indeed have found attractive, had the book been marketed to them, was an early section in what became Chapter 10 in which Marx writes very effectively in the first person as the voice of the labourer. This section uses plain language as the worker spells out to the capitalist the process in which the latter exploits the former, who subsequently demands a working day of normal length. The chapter also includes a range of examples of exploitation in different industries and locations—the majority in England. Some readers in the labour movement would recognise one or more of the examples as similar to their own experiences or those of people they represented. The chapter, furthermore, discusses in detail the efforts of capitalists in England to evade the consequences of legislation restricting the hours of work of women, young people and children, thus affecting the ability of men to work longer. Capitalism is portrayed as an evil exploiter who sucks the life out of the worker. To remind readers that this process is usually glossed over, Marx quotes a commissioner who had investigated the pottery industry and trusted that ‘a manufacture which has assumed so prominent place in the whole world, will not long be subject to the remark that its great success is accompanied with the physical deterioration, widespread bodily suffering, and early death of the workpeople... by whose labour and skill such great results have been achieved’.<sup>23</sup>

It is in this context of capitalism draining the life out of workers and then enjoying the fruits of their labour even after their death that Marx’s vampire makes its appearances in the chapter discussed in the previous paragraph. Marx used the vampire metaphor in a very different manner than he had employed the spectre in the preamble to the *Communist Manifesto*. In that pamphlet the spectre served as the character of a *reductio ad absurdum*.<sup>24</sup> In *Capital* the vampire was used, rather, as an analogy. As Carver and Mark Neocleous each suggest, vampire stories can only hold the reader’s attention if the vampire is actually doing something very real, and capitalism does exactly what vampires do—they suck the blood out of their victims and kill them.<sup>25</sup> It is useful to remember that, as the story goes, after people die at the fangs of vampires some of those previously innocent people carry on working—

<sup>22</sup> Friedrich Engels, ‘Engels to Hermann Meyer, 18 October 1867’, in *MECW*, Vol. 42 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1987), pp. 451-52.

<sup>23</sup> Marx, ‘*Capital*, Volume 1’, p. 254.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Lamb, *Marx and Engels’ Communist Manifesto: A Reader’s Guide* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 27.

<sup>25</sup> Carver, *Postmodern Marx*, pp. 18-19; Mark Neocleous, *The Monstrous and the Dead: Burke, Marx, Fascism* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), pp. 45-46

sucking the blood out of other people. Similarly the labour power of dead people sucks the life out of others after it has been transformed into capital.<sup>26</sup> ‘Capital’, Marx argued, ‘is dead labour, that vampire-like only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks.’<sup>27</sup>

Earlier in *Capital* Marx had described the stages and details of this process, but without summoning the vampire to play the villain. Some of Engels’ reviews likewise discuss the process, but unfortunately do not link it to the appearance of Marx’s vampires. Marx and Engels thus missed an opportunity to portray the process in exciting, tantalising terms in the reviews. Of course, because Engels wrote the reviews from perspectives critical of Marx’s arguments, the only appropriate way to have commented on the vampire metaphor would have been to ridicule it. This indeed may have provided the opportunity for Marx’s supporters to have engaged in the debate by spelling out just why Marx employed the vampire. Nevertheless, one can only speculate whether or not the reviews would have faced rejection as had some of those that Engels did produce. The strategy itself was, however, the fundamental problem, as Marx and Engels could have used their expertise far more effectively.

As will be discussed below, in collaboration with Marx, Engels tended in the reviews to focus on the drier detail that he was able to portray in terms of science, which writers such as Kautsky later employed in classical Marxism. Perhaps this would not have mattered so much if *Capital* had also been publicized in creative ways in order to attract the workers Marx hoped to persuade. There was an early opportunity to do this when *Capital*’s publisher Otto Meissner, who like Marx and Engels was concerned about the lack of publicity, wrote to the latter in February 1868 to request assistance in producing a powerful advertisement in order to break the silence. Engels drafted the advertisement and two months later asked Marx what he thought of it.<sup>28</sup> Marx replied a few days later, telling Engels that it was not written in his easygoing style.<sup>29</sup> The advertisement had still not been despatched for publication in May. After asking Marx if he had heard from Meissner, Engels added ‘...the man is still waiting for a reply from me’.<sup>30</sup> The advertisement was put to one side for several months. ‘Has not’, Engels asked Marx in September 1868, ‘a popular short presentation of the content of your book become an urgent necessity’. If not, Engels warned, somebody else would ‘come along and do it and botch it up’.<sup>31</sup> Marx did not deliver the short, concise work that Engels thus requested. Instead, he insisted that Engels would have to write it, reasoning that ‘I cannot

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<sup>26</sup> Mark Neocleous, ‘The Political Economy of the Dead: Marx’s Vampires’, *History of Political Thought*, 24 (4), 2003, p. 680.

<sup>27</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1’, p. 241.

<sup>28</sup> Friedrich Engels, ‘Engels to Karl Marx, 10 April 1868’, in *MECW*, Vol. 43 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> Karl Marx, ‘Marx to Engels, 11 April 1868’, in *MECW*, Vol. 43 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> Friedrich Engels, ‘Engels to Karl Marx, 22 May 1868’, in *MECW*, Vol. 43 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), p. 37.

<sup>31</sup> Friedrich Engels, ‘Engels to Karl Marx, 16 September 1868’, in *MECW*, Vol. 43 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), p. 100.

advertise my own book'.<sup>32</sup> This provoked an angry reply from Engels that 'it is absurd to claim that you could not write it yourself'. Referring to Marx's statement in April that it was not an easygoing style, Engels said: 'You had even wanted to write it yourself when I sent you one that you did not like.' 'Be so kind', he went on, 'as to return to this matter, and send me the advertisement you promised me then. I shall then pass it on to Meissner'.<sup>33</sup> Marx was not swayed by Engels' anger. For publicity, instead, he relied on Engels to write the batch of reviews in the strategy that was woefully inadequate to its purpose. In the long term, moreover, it was another missed opportunity and this helped open the way to the entrenchment of a view of *Capital* that did not do justice to the richness of the book.

### Engels' reviews

Pondering the disappointing initial reception of *Capital*, Marx commented to Kugelmann in November 1867 that 'the German press is still observing complete silence...'.<sup>34</sup> Although in July the following year he mentioned to a comrade in the First International that it had received a number of favourable reviews in Germany, he added that the conservative dailies, which he referred to as the 'big bourgeois and reactionary papers', were 'carefully keeping their mouths shut'.<sup>35</sup> There had also been very few reviews by mainstream economists in Germany and those that had appeared were in his view of poor quality. Furthermore, fewer copies of the book were sold than had been expected.

Marx had suspected that there would be conspiratorial behaviour.<sup>36</sup> Anticipating that this would be the case, he and Engels had begun as soon as the book was published to engage in their own conspiracy in return. The strategy of Engels' reviews was thus hatched. The idea was that if critical comments were published this would ignite debate and thus publicity. Indeed, Engels went so far as to suggest in November 1867 that the best thing would be 'to get the book denounced'.<sup>37</sup> The plan was for Engels to write reviews anonymously from several supposed viewpoints. Engels, having Marx's enthusiastic approval for the review strategy just before the book had gone to press, attacked *Capital* from a bourgeois perspective that was on the surface, unbiased and measured. As will be discussed below, he nevertheless, became frustrated as some of his reviews were published in other sorts of newspaper or periodical. Some of these reviews have not been discovered. Those that are available, along with the correspondence between Marx and Engels regarding them, indicate that their efforts could have been spent more creatively and productively.

<sup>32</sup> Karl Marx, 'Marx to Engels, 16 September 1868', in *MECW*, Vol. 43 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), p. 102.

<sup>33</sup> Friedrich Engels, 'Engels to Karl Marx, 18 September 1868', in *MECW*, Vol. 43 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), p. 103.

<sup>34</sup> Friedrich Engels, 'Engels to Ludwig Kugelmann, 8 and 20 November 1867', in *MECW*, Vol. 42 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1987), pp. 467.

<sup>35</sup> Karl Marx, 'Marx to Sigfrid Meyer, 4 July 1868', in *MECW*, Vol. 43 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), p. 61.

<sup>36</sup> Francis Wheen, *Karl Marx* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999), pp. 312-13; David McLellan, *Karl Marx: A Biography*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 324-25; Jonathan Sperber, *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life* (New York: Liveright, 2013), pp. 458-59.

<sup>37</sup> Friedrich Engels, 'Engels to Marx, 5 November 1867', in *MECW*, Vol. 42 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1987), p. 462.



In the review published in the democratically oriented *Die Zukunft* newspaper in Germany in October 1867 what stands out is Engels' claim to acknowledge the quality of its scientific approach.<sup>38</sup> Marx, Engels suggested, 'always endeavours to retain the path of strictly scientific analysis'.<sup>39</sup> Mainstream political economy, he concluded, needed to begin to produce work of similar quality. Engels was beginning to portray Marx's book as a work of science which, if it were to be refuted, needed to be challenged in similar scientific terms. This is not the place to rehearse the debate about the merits or otherwise of Engels' scientific version of Marxism.<sup>40</sup> What is instead significant is that his portrayal of Marx's work in *Capital* in such terms was, effectively and inadvertently, to create a red herring.

The review in *Die Zukunft* actually does offer a reasonable summary of the book, drawing particular attention to the argument in the chapter on the Working Day. Engels, nevertheless, voiced to Marx his dissatisfaction with the review. It was, he said, 'the tamest of them all...'.<sup>41</sup> Not only that, it had, moreover, been 'shortened and mutilated' for publication. He was furious, as he would have written a very different view if he had known that Kugelmann, who had been asked to find publishers for the reviews, was going to send it to *Die Zukunft*. He had assumed it was going to be submitted to one of the national liberal papers as part of the strategy of stimulating debate with critics who would be hostile to the theories presented in *Capital*.

Engels' review for *Die Zukunft*, however, was not the least successful. To Engels' astonishment, Kugelmann had sent a manuscript of another of his reviews to the editor of *Rheinische Zeitung* who had rejected it on the grounds that the workers would not understand it.<sup>42</sup> This does seem a rather strange or timid editorial decision. This review was actually perhaps the most clear and concise summary of the book. It began by anticipating the impact that universal male suffrage would have when introduced in Germany as planned in 1871. In taking advantage of the opportunities this would bring, the social democratic politicians would 'welcome the present book as their theoretical bible...'.<sup>43</sup> The review goes on to acknowledge Marx's 'rare scholarship' and 'expert knowledge' that enabled him to build a case for connecting the entire relationship between capital and labour with economic science as a whole and to conclude that the capitalist mode of production would need to be abolished. For these reasons Marx could be distinguished from orthodox economists. Engels offers a précis of Marx's discussion of the exchange of commodities for money and the

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<sup>38</sup> For Engels' request for Marx's view on taking this approach see Friedrich Engels, 'Engels to Marx, 11 September 1867', in *MECW*, Vol. 42 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1987), pp. 426-27. For Marx's approval see Karl Marx, 'Marx to Engels, 12 September 1867', in *MECW*, Vol. 42 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1987), p. 427.

<sup>39</sup> Friedrich Engels, 'Review of Volume 1 of *Capital* for *Die Zukunft*', in *MECW*, Vol. 20 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985), p. 208.

<sup>40</sup> For a good brief account of the debate see Geoff Boucher, *Understanding Marxism* (Durham: Acumen, 2012), pp. 49-54.

<sup>41</sup> Friedrich Engels, 'Engels to Marx, 5 November 1867', in *MECW*, Vol. 42 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1987), p. 461.

<sup>42</sup> Friedrich Engels, 'Engels to Marx, 12 December 1867', in *MECW*, Vol. 42 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1987), p. 498.

<sup>43</sup> Friedrich Engels, 'Review of Volume 1 of *Capital* for the *Rheinische Zeitung*', in *MECW*, Vol. 20 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985), p. 210.

transformation of money into capital, before focusing on the commodity central to *Capital*: that of labour power. The surplus value that is created by paying the worker for what are in effect less hours than are worked means that the capitalist can make a profit after paying the labourer just enough for the necessities for living. This leads on in the review to a concise discussion of the working day and the importance of cooperation, division of labour and machinery to the generation of greater amounts of capital.

‘We must’ Engels stressed in the penultimate paragraph of the review, referring to wages being less than the total product of labour, ‘hope that this book will provide the opportunity for the gentlemen of the orthodox tradition to give us more enlightenment on this really strange point.’<sup>44</sup> The final paragraph is interesting in that it tantalises the reader by stating that ‘the work is very easy to follow and is made most interesting by the author’s sarcastic manner of writing which spares no one’.<sup>45</sup> Even in this paragraph, however, an opportunity was missed to warn readers why the first chapter should be persevered with. Before the statement that the book was easy to read Engels qualified this with ‘except for the somewhat stark dialectical style on the first 40 pages and in spite of its scientific strictness...’.<sup>46</sup> This concession on the matter of style could have been accompanied with the reason why that first chapter needed to discuss commodities in such painstaking detail. An appropriate comment here could have been something like the following recent sentence offered by Paul Thomas: ‘Few modern economists would spend time worrying, as Marx did, about what a commodity is.’<sup>47</sup> The ground for that worry was of course that Marx was concerned with the reason why, in the capitalist epoch, certain products came to be identified as commodities. Engels could thus have opened a debate on the merits or otherwise of starting the book in such a way.

Of course, such a revised version of the review may have been likewise rejected. Nevertheless, this material may have been suitable for a different sort of article or a pamphlet. This leads us to another missed opportunity. Amidst their angry exchange regarding the advertisement, in September 1868 Marx added: ‘And it would be a very good thing if you yourself wrote a small popular explanatory pamphlet. Let us hope that things will now get going.’<sup>48</sup> This remark seems to indicate that he was already expecting Engels to have at least begun to write such a pamphlet. Engels had, indeed, already begun over the previous few months to summarise *Capital* Volume 1 in the form of a synopsis.<sup>49</sup> It was, nevertheless, never finished or published. It cut back Marx’s argument to the essentials, and thus lacked the humour, richness sarcasm and metaphors that made the book very entertaining to those who have braved the book’s reputation and read it. One might, therefore, doubt that, if this synopsis had been published as a pamphlet, it would have served the purpose that Marx had hoped for. Perhaps the time would have been better spent had Marx took hold of the synopsis

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 213.

<sup>45</sup> Idem.

<sup>46</sup> Idem.

<sup>47</sup> Paul Thomas, *Karl Marx* (London: Reaktion, 2012), p. 132.

<sup>48</sup> Marx, ‘Marx to Engels, 16 September 1868’, p. 102.

<sup>49</sup> Friedrich Engels, ‘Synopsis of Volume One of *Capital* by Karl Marx, in *MECW*, Vol. 20 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985), pp. 296-308.

himself and converted it into an exciting pamphlet as he had done by converting Engels' *Principles of Communism* into *The Communist Manifesto*.<sup>50</sup>

Engels did actually attempt to inject a tinge of humour in the short review published in the *Elberfelder Zeitung* in November 1867. He pretended to react with sarcasm to Marx's argument that the unpaid labour of which the capital of the bankers, merchants, manufacturers and large landowners consists should be returned to the working class. 'That', he wrote, 'would indeed raise the question *who* in particular would be entitled to receive it.'<sup>51</sup> The main emphasis of this review was, however, on science. *Capital*, Engels suggested, had 'a claim to be regarded as most strictly scientific', provided 'the scientific basis for socialist aspirations', was presented in thoroughly scientific form', and 'appeals with his unusual propositions not to the masses but to the men of science'. The latter 'men' would thus need to defend their economic theories to prove that whilst capital was accumulated labour, such labour was not unpaid'.<sup>52</sup> Now the claim that it appealed to the men of science rather than to the masses is not entirely consistent with the closing sentence: 'The social-democratic seed has sprouted among the younger generation and the working population of many a place—through this book it will in any case find plenty of new nourishment'.<sup>53</sup> Actually one can, given some of the comments of Marx and Engels mentioned above regarding the intended readership, see that the book was intended for both the masses and the intellectuals. Indeed, the words '...not to the masses but to the men of science' served as a figure of speech to emphasize the intended readership of this review rather than of the book itself. This was a part of their strategy in the reviews to draw their opponents into debate. Science was, however, for Engels rather more than part of this figure of speech, as his later popularization of Marxism in such terms illustrates. By portraying *Capital* in terms of science Engels was already, as was mentioned above, paving the way for his later approach, a purpose of which would be to present the supposedly scientific socialist theory in ways more accessible to a wide readership which Marx supposedly could not reach.

Science features prominently in Engels' review published unsigned in the liberal-leaning *Düsseldorfer Zeitung* in November 1867. This one began in a rather different tone than the others, opening with: 'This book will disappoint many a reader.'<sup>54</sup> This was because although the book went into great detail about what was wrong with the present society (the worker not obtaining the full value of the product of their labour), and the need thus to abolish capital altogether, it only, according to Engels, gave 'very dark hints' about what communism after the social revolution would be like. Suggesting that the second and third volumes that had been promised would tell the reader little more in this respect, he said readers of this one would need to content themselves with a detailed study in which the

<sup>50</sup> Friedrich Engels, *Principles of Communism* and Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in *MECW*, Vol. 20 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976), pp. 341-357 and pp. 477-519.

<sup>51</sup> Friedrich Engels, 'Review of Volume One of *Capital* for the *Elberfelder Zeitung*', in *MECW*, Vol. 20 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985), p. 214.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 214-15.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

<sup>54</sup> Friedrich Engels, 'Review of Volume One of *Capital* for the *Düsseldorfer Zeitung*', in *MECW*, Vol.20 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985), p. 216.

underpayment of the worker is knitted into, or placed in opposition to, the main propositions of political economy. Engels' concern to present Marxism as science appears in this review with Engels stating that unlike similar earlier writings, *Capital* had the great advantage of its author's 'attempt to be strictly scientific'.<sup>55</sup> The propositions of political economy were presented, he went on, not as eternally valid truths, 'but as the results of certain historical developments'. At this point the roots of Engels' later attempt to apply the material conception of history to the natural sciences come clearly into view, as he stressed that they were 'being transformed more and more into historical sciences'. He cited as examples 'Laplace's astronomical theory, the whole of geology and the works of Darwin', before reminding readers that political economy has, like mathematics, been considered an 'abstract and universally valid' science. 'Whatever may be the fate of the remaining propositions of this book, he concluded, 'we regard it as a lasting merit of Marx to have put an end to this narrow-minded concept'.<sup>56</sup> Engels was thus already beginning to formulate his view of the natural sciences in dialectical terms, suggesting that Marx was the founder of this approach, as he would do again later in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* and *Anti-Dühring*.<sup>57</sup> In this review he was thus inviting response and criticism to help publicize the supposed venture by Marx into the scientific domain. One may assume that he was hoping to enter the debate by arguing that Marxism should indeed be understood in such terms.

Engels continued the historical scientific theme in a review he wrote in early December 1867, which was published in the petty-bourgeois democratic newspaper *Der Beobachter* that month. A distinction must be made, he suggested, between on the one hand *Capital* Volume One's 'solid, positive expositions' which greatly enriched science and on the other hand 'the tendential conclusions the author draws from them'. The positive expositions, he went on, treated 'economic relations with a quite new, materialistic, natural-historic method'.<sup>58</sup> Now at this point Engels actually offered a potentially very useful, concise summary of the volume. Marx, he suggested, very expertly traced in detail 'the various successive forms of industrial production: co-operation, the division of labour and with it manufacture in the narrower sense, and lastly machinery, large-scale industry and the corresponding social combinations and relations which naturally grow one from the other'.<sup>59</sup> Marx endeavoured, he went on, 'to show that present-day society, economically considered, is pregnant with another, higher form of society'.<sup>60</sup> The pregnancy of the existing society, which would thus beget a higher form is a clear expression of historical progression in dialectical terms. In the valuable time available to Engels and Marx this summary could have been paraphrased again and again to publicise the volume in reviews, pamphlets, advertisements and other publications.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 217.

<sup>56</sup> Idem.

<sup>57</sup> Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, in MECW, Vol. 24 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), pp. 301-305; Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, in MECW, Vol. 25 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1987), pp. 23-27.

<sup>58</sup> Friedrich Engels, Review of *Capital* Volume One for the *Beobachter*, in MECW, Vol. 20 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985), p. 224.

<sup>59</sup> Idem

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, pp. 224-25.

Engels statement in the review for *Der Beobachter* that Marx adopted a materialist , natural-historic method, represents an effort in that article to portray *Capital* Volume One as a book in which Marx extended his social scientific method into the natural sciences. Marx, Engels went on, ‘merely strives to present as law in the social sphere the same process which Darwin traced in natural history, a process of gradual evolution’. Such a gradual transformation had indeed, Engels stressed, ‘taken place in social relations from antiquity through the Middle Ages to the present’.<sup>61</sup> Engels then went on to the main point of the review, which was to suggest that Marx’s subjective, socialist conclusions were refuted by the objective view that advanced capitalism was a necessary stage on the way to the desired society. The argument against Marx is actually weak as the latter view did not refute the socialist conclusions; but of course Engels did not believe what he was writing, and presented such a poor argument in order that it would be challenged in open debate.

In two other anonymous reviews Engels attempted to stimulate discussion of a rather different aspect of *Capital* Volume One. In a review published in December 1867 in the Stuttgart government daily paper *Staats-Anzeiger für Württemberg*, he stressed in the guise of a bourgeois critic that he certainly did not take the book into account because of its author’s ‘specifically socialist tendency’.<sup>62</sup> It was, rather, *Capital’s* scientific expositions and factual material did need to be taken seriously and it was, he went on, the factual material on which this review would focus. The chapters on Co-operation, Manufacture and Large-scale Industry, he suggested represented the best available history of industry since the Middle Ages. Focusing on the situation in mid-nineteenth century England he offered particular praise for Marx’s sourcing of the facts, deriving as they did from English parliamentary reports, the equivalent of which were unavailable for study of German industry. Stressing a situation which would today be called interdependence or even globalization, he suggested that German businessmen who wanted to see the broader picture of industry in the world would find the book particularly useful. Those businessmen should take note of the legislation that had recently been passed in England, and which *Capital* reported, as it was likely that similar demands on German businesses would soon be forthcoming. One month after this review a similar one was published in the Mannheim daily democratic paper the *Neue Badische Landeszeitung*. Engels began by declaring he would ‘leave it to others to deal with the theoretical and strictly scientific part of this work and criticise the new view the author gives of the origin of capital’.<sup>63</sup> Like the previous review this one praised the extent and detail of the statistical material, sourced from official commission reports to parliament, included in *Capital*. This material was valuable for revealing the internal social and working conditions of the poorer classes of Britain. The reports made bias difficult and had led to legislation to improve such conditions, particularly the length of the working day. If their

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p. 225.

<sup>62</sup> Friedrich Engels, Review of *Capital* Volume One for the *Staats-Anzeiger für Württemberg*, in MECW, Vol. 20 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985), p. 227.

<sup>63</sup> Friedrich Engels, Review of *Capital* Volume One for the *Neue Badische Landeszeitung*, in MECW, Vol. 20 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985), p. 229.

equivalent were available for Germany, Engels suggested, readers would be horrified, whatever they might think of Marx's theories in the book.

With the reviews in the *Staats-Anzeiger für Württemberg* and *Neue Badische Landeszeitung* Engels seems to have been trying to tempt bourgeois economists into debate on facts which he and Marx would have replied from a position of strength. This sort of review may also have tempted a more general readership to pick up *Capital* and thus be led by means of Marx's stylistic writing in the book to appreciate the theory. Far greater effort was, however, expended in vain by Engels, with Marx's encouragement, on a review for the London- magazine the *Fortnightly*. Marx and Engels were thus diversifying their efforts to a wider field than the German bourgeoisie at whom most of the reviews were targeted. This review was not published. Referring to it Harold Laski stressed in a pamphlet of 1921 that 'not even Professor Beesly's persuasiveness could induce George Henry Lewes to insert a long notice from Engels in the *Fortnightly*'.<sup>64</sup> Actually Lewes had, by then, been succeeded as editor of the *Fortnightly Review* by the liberal John Morley. It was the latter editor who rejected it on the grounds that it was unreadable, despite the efforts of the academic radical Edward Beesly, who had chaired the first meeting of the First International, to persuade him.

Marx had initially insisted that Engels write a review for the *Fortnightly* in October 1867, encouraging him to arouse the interest of Lewes and that Beesly, who had become hugely influential on publishers in London, 'will get it in'.<sup>65</sup> Engels replied that he would be pleased to write it and that he aimed to get it published quickly, in November or December that year.<sup>66</sup> By May the following year Marx contacted Engels to say that the review for the *Fortnightly* was now urgent.<sup>67</sup> A few days later Engels replied to say that, at last, he had some time to spend on it but conceded that he did not know how to start. It was, he went on 'clear to me that I will begin with the conversion of money into capital, but how is still quite unclear'.<sup>68</sup> He asked for Marx's advice on this. Later that month, having yet to receive any advice other than that it should be published under a *nom de guerre*, Engels was more specific in his confession that he could not find a way to begin the review. 'It is', he declared 'damned difficult to make clear the dialectical method to the English who read the reviews, and I surely cannot approach the crowd with the equations C— M— C, etc'.<sup>69</sup> Engels was referring to the section entitled 'Money, or the Circulation of Commodities' that, having originally appeared in the first chapter, subsequently became part of Chapter 3, and the section that originally formed Chapter 2 but subsequently became Chapter 4.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Harold Laski, *Karl Marx: An Essay* (London: Fabian Society and George Allen and Unwin, 1921), p. 23

<sup>65</sup> Karl Marx, 'Marx to Engels, 19 October 1867', in *MECW*, Vol. 42 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1987), p. 452.

<sup>66</sup> Friedrich Engels, 'Engels to Marx, 1 November 1867', in *MECW*, Vol. 42 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1987), p. 457.

<sup>67</sup> Karl Marx, 'Marx to Engels, 7 May 1868', in *MECW*, Vol. 43 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), p. 30.

<sup>68</sup> Friedrich Engels, 'Engels to Marx, 15 May 1868', in *MECW*, Vol. 43 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), p. 34.

<sup>69</sup> Friedrich Engels, 'Engels to Marx, 22 May 1868', in *MECW*, Vol. 43 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), p. 37.

<sup>70</sup> Marx, '*Capital*, Volume 1', pp. 103-56 and 157-66.

‘It appears to me’, Marx replied to Engels words of caution, ‘that you are on the wrong track with your fear of presenting such simple formulas as M—C—M, etc. to the English review philistines.’<sup>71</sup> ‘The trick’, Marx stressed, lay in ‘so mystifying the reader and causing him to rack his brain, that he may finally be relieved to discover that these HARD WORDS are only fancy dress for *loci communes* [platitudes].’<sup>72</sup> Marx’s reply amounted to a costly error in terms of publicity for *Capital*. The equations are by no means difficult to understand; but the focus on them certainly does not make the long review into an article with which many readers would be tempted to persevere. The article was made worse still by its introduction. Marx advised Engels to start with a brief discussion of the way in which *Capital* differed from the work of Thomas Tooke, who had argued in the 1840s that money in the form of capital undergoes a reflux to the point of issue, while it does not do so in the form of currency. Marx told Engels to stress that *Capital* takes this distinction as its starting point for its study of the nature of capital. ‘I believe’, Marx went on, ‘that you will make the matter easier for yourself and the reader by quoting the formulas.’<sup>73</sup>

Following his instructions Engels began with a paragraph on Tooke—a paragraph that would have not have been attractive to any readers other than specialists in economics.<sup>74</sup> He then duly proceeded to the formulae, presented in three pages of dense discussion.<sup>75</sup> In fact, readers who are prepared to work through these early pages of the review, find in the later stages some interesting discussion of the working day and the effects upon working people. Quoting extensively from *Capital*, Engels reports the picture the book presents of capitalism as a system or structure which uses up the labour power of people, working them into an early grave or a miserable existence whereby they are no longer able to work and earn. Capitalism was thus, theoretically, operating in a way that was detrimental to the capitalists who are constantly in search of replacement workers to exploit. In practice, there was a pool of labour from the agricultural districts on which the English capitalist relied. Amongst the comparative comments that Engels, following Marx, presents is that of the situation of the workers in England on the one hand and that of slaves in the United States before emancipation on the other. The incorporation of slavery into an otherwise capitalist system involved the calculated working to death within seven years to the other horrors of slavery.<sup>76</sup> Material such as this in the review would have been more appealing to a general readership than the formulae which, if included at all, might have been introduced later.

In addition to the reviews he wrote in the guise of an opponent of Marx, Engels produced quite a lengthy review article which was published, initially anonymously, in two

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<sup>71</sup> Karl Marx, ‘Marx to Engels, 23 May 1868’, in *MECW*, Vol. 43 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), p. 38.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>74</sup> Engels, Review of Volume One of *Capital* for the *Fortnightly Review*, p. 238.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 239-41.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 251-54.

parts in a workers' newspaper, the *Demokratisches Wochenblatt*, in March 1868.<sup>77</sup> Whilst the review does present the key features of *Capital* in a clear and concise style, it is clear from his eventually angry exchange with Marx that year that he was not entirely comfortable with writing something intended to be a popular piece among those unfamiliar with academic literature. As was mentioned earlier, he would eventually free himself from such trepidation. Nevertheless, it would probably have been more appropriate at this time for Marx to have written the popular piece, as Engels was never able to add the sparkle, drive and wit to his writing that his intellectual partner certainly could.

## Conclusion

The editor of the *Fortnightly* was probably wise to spare his readers the review that Engels had written at the request of Marx. Moreover, and more importantly, Engels and Marx could have used the time far more productively. They could indeed thus have produced the sort of article for mass readership that Marx had wanted Engels to write in addition to the reviews.

Marx, however, was asking too much of the busy Engels. Engels, furthermore, was beginning to set his own agenda regarding the way in which he wanted Marxism to develop. The time that Engels did give very generously was not used anything like as productively as might have been the case if they had focused their attention on a pamphlet to present the argument of *Capital* in a concise, lively style. Anyone who has read both Engels' *Principles of Communism* and Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto* on the same day will see that it was Marx who possessed the skill required to produce such a pamphlet. Instead the work of Marx and Engels in late 1867 and throughout the year that followed served inadvertently for something not unlike one of the uses of the magic cap to which Marx had referred very effectively in the preface to the first edition of *Capital*.<sup>78</sup> This was not, however, the use to which Perseus put the cap of invisibility in order to avoid the other gorgons after slaying Medusa. Marx and Engels fabricated a cap that served, instead, to conceal the gorgon of capitalism from the people who needed most to understand the nature of this modern-day Medusa.

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<sup>77</sup> Friedrich Engels, 'Review of Volume One of *Capital* for the *Demokratisches Wochenblatt*', in MECW, Vol. 20 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985), p. 231-37.

<sup>78</sup> Marx, '*Capital*, Volume 1', p. 9.