

PUBLISHING MARX AND ENGELS AFTER 1989: THE FATE OF THE MEGA

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Introduction

After the events in the GDR in the fall of 1989 it became clear that the days of the the ruling party of the GDR, the SED, were numbered. At that time nobody expected the unification of the two German states to take place as soon as it did. However, at the end of 1989 it could be foreseen that things in the GDR would change fundamentally. Particularly, it was more than doubtful, whether the SED party institute, the Institute of Marxism-Leninism (IML) in Berlin, would continue to exist for much longer. Of course the possible disbanding of the IML as such was something one could get over. But those interested in the MEGA could not ignore the fact that, with regard to this project, the disbanding of the Berlin institute could have had fatal consequences. The IML in Berlin had published the MEGA in cooperation with the IML in Moscow. However, the main part of the work had been done and financed by the Berlin institute. It was pretty clear that the Moscow institute would not have been able and probably would not even have been willing to continue the work on the MEGA alone.

The International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam received the first may-day calls from Berlin in late December 1989. Soon afterwards both the Berlin and Moscow IML asked the IISH formally to enter into talks on how discontinuation of the MEGA could be prevented. A similar request was addressed to the Karl Marx House of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Trier, in what was then West Germany. Both the IISH and the Karl Marx House agreed at once. The first talks took place in Amsterdam in the second half of January 1990.

One may ask why the two IML turned specifically to the IISH and the Karl Marx House and why the latter agreed to help so quickly. To explain the reasons I have to say a few words about scholarly editions such as the MEGA, the history of the Marx-Engels archives, and the attitude of the IISH and the Karl Marx House towards the MEGA during the preceding years.

Why Collect?

Collected works of certain writers have been published in Europe since the 17th and 18th centuries, when, together with the development of arts and literature, a reading public emerged. As most scholars know from their own experience, when some time has passed by, it is rather difficult to get hold of the books and articles of a given author. Usually they were published here and there, books are out of print, journals can be found only in some libraries, in some cases only very few copies have been preserved, some works may have been published anonymously, and so on. Thus, editions of collected works have been merely a means to make the most important works of a given author available to a broad public. As far as Marx and Engels

are concerned, plans for the publication of a collection of their works already emerged during their lifetime.¹

Some writers have been considered to be of such an importance that, rather than only a collected works, the collection of their *complete* works was thought worthwhile. Obviously such projects are much more ambitious: to meet the claim to completeness a lot of research is required.

Over time the demands regarding the editing of the texts increased. The texts were to be edited in a correct form, that is, in accordance with the author's own intentions. Thus, the printed text should be compared with the author's manuscript if such a manuscript existed. However, what to do if there are several manuscript versions representing various stages of the author's work or his various attempts at finding the most adequate expression of his ideas? Or if there were several editions of a given work during the author's lifetime and if the author himself or herself made changes in later editions? Did his or her authentic intentions manifest themselves most clearly in the original, that is, the earliest version? Or should the author's "last will" be regarded as decisive? Usually these problems are solved by informing the reader about differences between the various versions in a so called apparatus. Editions of this type, based on thorough research into the life and work of the given author, were called scholarly (*wissenschaftliche*) editions.

The development of scholarly editorship was also closely connected with the emergence of a critical approach to history. From the Renaissance on, historians increasingly subscribed to the idea that true historical knowledge can only be derived from a thorough analysis of the sources. Accordingly the historian was expected, on the one hand, to be critical with regard to the sources, and on the other hand, with regard to myths, legends and ideological misrepresentations of the past.² The high regard for sources manifested itself in a growing number of publications of documents. Such publications fulfill a double function. They, too, are meant to make the texts available to a broad public. But at the same time they are meant, as it were, to open these texts up. The first aim, at least today, could be attained by photocopies, microfilm or similar means. However, to many students these copies would be of little use. Many students would not be able to understand - or even read - the texts in question. Thus, the documents are reproduced in printed form. Nevertheless the editor is expected to give all information about the original, which might be relevant from any point of view. Further, he or she is expected to give additional information facilitating the understanding of the document, for instance some information about when, by whom and for what purpose it was produced, and explanatory notes, as needed. All this should serve both of the critical aims mentioned before. That is why editions of this type are sometimes, and particularly in Germany, called historical-critical (*historisch-kritisch*).

MEGA's Roots

¹ See Jürgen Rojahn, 'Tableau de l'édition scientifique de Marx', *Actuel Marx*, 1987, No. 1, pp. 94-104, esp. p. 95.

² See Jerzy Topolski, *Metodologia historii*, 2nd ed. (Warsaw, 1973), pp. 75ff.

The idea of the publication of the complete works of Marx or, possibly, of Marx and Engels, "meeting all demands of scholarly editing", was discussed for the first time at a meeting of prominent Austro-Marxists in December 1910.³ This meeting was also attended by David Borisovich Riazanov, who started to realize the plan in the 1920s, calling his edition explicitly *historisch-kritische Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*.

Considering the circumstances, Riazanov's achievements were, no doubt, impressive. However, the "first" MEGA met only partly the standards of historical-critical editing. And those who developed the plan of the second MEGA in the 1960s were aware this. From what I said before, it will be clear that a historical-critical edition could not be realized without consulting the original manuscripts. Only a small part of these manuscripts was in Moscow.

When Marx died in 1883, he left his papers to Engels, and when Engels died in 1895, he left his own papers to August Bebel and Eduard Bernstein, functioning as trustees of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). Some years later these papers were brought from London to Berlin and deposited in the party archives of the SPD. According to Engels's will, Marx's papers were given to Marx's daughters. First they were kept by Eleanor Marx Aveling in London. After her death in 1898, Marx's other daughter, Laura Lafargue, living at the time in Draveil near Paris, took care of them.⁴ After her death, the major part of Marx's papers, too, was deposited in the SPD party archives in Berlin.⁵ Thus, from that time on the bulk of the Marx-Engels archives was held by the SPD.

When Riazanov started the "first" MEGA in the 1920s in Russia he got the SPD's permission to make photocopies of the Marx-Engels papers. However, after the Comintern's turn to ultra-leftist tactics in 1928 the SPD, enraged by the Communists' attacks, cancelled the agreement, which, in fact, meant the beginning of the end of the first MEGA.⁶

Berlin and Moscow

After Hitler's came to power in 1933 the most valuable parts of the SPD archives, including the Marx-Engels papers, were taken abroad. Some years later they were sold to a Dutch in-

³ See Götz Langkau, 'Marx-Gesamtausgabe - dringendes Parteiinteresse oder dekorativer Zweck? Ein Wiener Editionsplan zum 30. Todestag, Briefe und Briefauszüge', *International Review of Social History*, 28 (1983), pp. 105-142.

⁴ See Paul Mayer, 'Die Geschichte des sozialdemokratischen Parteiarchivs und das Schicksal des Marx-Engels-Nachlasses', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 6/7 (1966/67), pp. 5-198, esp. pp. 38ff.

⁵ See Jürgen Rojahn, 'Aus der Frühzeit der Marx-Engels-Forschung: Rjazanovs Studien in den Jahren 1907-1917 im Licht seiner Briefwechsel im IISG', *MEGA-Studien*, 1996/1, pp. 3-65, esp. pp. 37-39.

⁶ See 'Die Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe', *Marx-Engels-Archiv. Zeitschrift des Marx-Engels-Instituts in Moskau*, ed. by D. Rjazanov, Vol. 1 (Frankfurt/M., s.a.), pp. 461-466, and Siegfried Bahne, 'Zur Geschichte der ersten Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe', Hans-Peter Harstick, Arno Herzig and Hans Pelger (eds.), in *Arbeiterbewegung und Geschichte. Festschrift für Shlomo Na'aman zum 70. Geburtstag*, Schriften aus dem Karl-Marx-Haus Trier, 29 (Trier, 1983), pp. 146-165.

surance company, which in turn gave them to the newly established IISH in Amsterdam, where they have been held since that time.⁷ Thus, when the two IML in Berlin and Moscow at the end of the 1960s started the work on the second MEGA, which was a much more ambitious project, than the first MEGA had been, they had to turn to the IISH.

The IISH hesitated. On the one hand, a historical-critical edition of the complete works of Marx and Engels was considered necessary. The IISH, with its small staff, was unable to run such a big project itself. Nor was there any other Western institution that would be willing to do it. Apart from this, at that time it was doubtful whether the Moscow IML would support any Western project of the sort permitting the use of the documents in its possession. On the other hand, the IISH, being itself an independent institution, did not like the idea of cooperating with party institutes such as the two IML in Moscow and Berlin. Eventually, the IISH decided to allow the use of the documents in its possession, but declined any direct participation in the project. The two IML, on their part, promised to make their material accessible to scholars from the IISH.

During the following years cooperation proved to be useful to both sides, and as a result of frequent contacts the relationship between the scholars involved became more and more relaxed. As for the MEGA volumes published from 1975 on, a strong ideological touch was quite obvious. However, it did not seriously affect the scholarly character of the venture.⁸ In view of this the project was supported by a growing number of institutions all over the world. In particular the Karl Marx House in Trier, in what was then West Germany, followed the work on the MEGA closely. Combining the functions both of museum and research institute, the Karl Marx House too maintained close contacts to the MEGA editors.

After the Wall came down

⁷ See Mayer, 'Die Geschichte des sozialdemokratischen Parteiarchivs und das Schicksal des Marx-Engels-Nachlasses, pp. 79ff., and Maria Hunink, *De papieren van de revolutie. Het Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis 1935-1947* (Amsterdam, 1986), esp. pp. 52ff.

⁸ See, for instance, Fred E. Schrader, 'Karl Marx - Forschung oder Denkmalspflege?', *Internationale wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, 16 (1980), pp. 398-403, and Jürgen Rojahn, 'Die Marxschen Manuskripte aus dem Jahre 1844 in der neuen Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe (MEGA)', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 25 (1985), pp. 647-663.

Therefore, in 1990 both the IISH and the Karl Marx House were prepared to take part in efforts to secure the continuation of the MEGA. However, they made two conditions:

- 1) the MEGA should be continued as a purely academic edition, that is, the editorial work should not be influenced by - or subordinated to - the interests and needs of any political party;
- 2) the MEGA should be continued within a broader international framework, that is, each institution or person capable of - and interested in - participating in the work on the MEGA should be allowed to do so.

The first point has been a matter of principle. As for the latter, practical reasons were decisive:

- 1) Marx and Engels had lived in various countries: in Germany, France, Belgium and, last but not least, England. From the early 1840s on their perspective had been clearly an international one. This international perspective had influenced both their studies and their political activities. This is especially true of Marx, whose studies concerned not only a broad variety of fields such as law, philosophy, history, political economy, technology, agriculture, chemistry, geology, physics, mathematics, ethnology, and so on, but which also concerned a variety of countries, such as Germany, France, Britain, Ireland, Scandinavia, Poland, Russia, the Balkans, Italy, Spain, the USA, China, India and so on. As a result of their political activities Marx and Engels became central figures of a worldwide movement, one which was developing in each country according to its specific conditions. It was doubtful whether all this could be covered by one or two institutes. Specialists in various fields and from various countries were needed.
- 2) The Marx-Engels archives are partly in Amsterdam (about 2/3) and partly in Moscow (about 1/3). At the same time a considerable part of the editorial work would have to be done in Germany, German being the language of the edition.
- 3) It was doubtful whether the work would be continued in Germany in the future on the same scale as before. An international division of labour - and costs - might be helpful.
- 4) The creation of an international framework might help to safeguard the continuation of the project, which, it was hoped, would not be dependent on the changing conditions in one country.

An agreement on all this was reached very soon, and in the fall of 1990 the International Marx-Engels Foundation (*Internationale Marx-Engels-Stiftung*; IMES) was established in Amsterdam.⁹ The IMES has no other task than that of completing the MEGA. The term "foundation" may be misleading. According to Dutch law anybody may establish a foundation.

⁹ For a more detailed description, see Jürgen Rojahn, 'Und sie bewegt sich doch! Die Fortsetzung der Arbeit an der MEGA unter dem Schirm der IMES', *MEGA-Studien*, 1994/1, pp. 5-31.

The only thing he or she has to do is to go to a notary and to submit statutes which are in accordance with the law. The name "foundation" does not imply the existence of any funds. The IMES, with its headquarters in Amsterdam, can be best described as an international network. It has a Board, consisting of the directors - or another top official - of the affiliated institutions,¹⁰ and a small Secretariat, dealing with the current affairs. Further, it has an international Editorial Committee, co-ordinating the work on the MEGA and controlling the uniformity and quality of the editorial work.¹¹ Finally, it has an international Advisory Board, consisting of prominent scholars from all over the World.¹² However, the IMES as such does not have any funds at its disposal.

When the IMES was formed in 1990, it was supposed that the MEGA teams in the GDR and in Moscow would be able to continue their work and that new teams would try to find the necessary funds themselves. However, events took another course. In 1989 at the IML in Berlin there were some dozens of scholars who had been working on the MEGA. Further, there had been MEGA teams at various universities of the GDR. The MEGA team at the Moscow IML also included some forty scholars. Two years later, very little of this was left. After the unification of the two German states the existing MEGA teams in the GDR were closed down, and after the unsuccessful coup against Gorbachev in August 1991 the IML in Moscow too was disbanded. Actually, it was split into three new institutions. The former Central Party Archives, in which the Moscow part of the Marx-Engels documents were stored, were placed under the supervision of the Archives Commission of the Russian Federation, the Library was placed under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture and the Institute itself was re-established as an independent foundation. The latter institute was willing to continue the work on the MEGA, but it would not be able to provide the necessary funds.

Making Progress

For some time the situation seemed to be desperate. However, the IMES was not willing to give up. On the one hand, it did its best to inform and mobilize the public, on the other hand it tried to establish contacts with the relevant authorities. Actually it received remarkably broad

¹⁰ At present: Kirill M. Anderson (RTsKhIDNI, Moscow), Jaap Kloosterman (IISH, Amsterdam), Herfried Münkler (BBAW, Berlin), Hans Pelger (KMH, Trier).

¹¹ At present: Elena M. Arzhanova (Moscow), Georgii A. Bagaturia (Moscow), Terrell Carver (Bristol), Galina G. Golovina (Moscow), Jürgen Herres (Berlin), Götz Langkau (Amsterdam), Manfred Neuhaus (Berlin), Teinosuke Otani (Tokyo), Jürgen Rojahn (Amsterdam) Liudmila L. Vasina (Moscow), Carl-Erich Vollgraf (Berlin), Wei Jianhua (Beijing).

¹² At present: Shlomo Avineri (Jerusalem), Gerd Callesen (Copenhagen), Robert E. Cazden (Lexington, KY), Iring Fetscher (Frankfurt/M.), Eric J. Fischer (Amsterdam), Patrick Fridenson (Paris), Francesca Gori (Milan), Andrzej F. Grabski (1ódi), Carlos B. Gutiérrez (Bogotá), Hans-Peter Harstick (Braunschweig), Eric J. Hobsbawm (London), Hermann Klenner (Berlin), Michael Knieriem (Wuppertal), Jürgen Kocka (Berlin), Nikolai I. Lapin (Moscow), Hermann Lübke (Zurich), Michail P. Mchedlov (Moscow), Teodor I. Oizerman (Moscow), Bertell Ollman (new York), Tsutomu Ouchi (Tokyo), Pedro Ribas (Madrid), Wolfgang Schieder (Cologne), Walter Schmidt (Berlin), Gareth Stedman Jones (Cambridge), Jean Stengers (Brussel), Toshiro Sugimoto (Kanagawa), Ferenc TÁkei (Budapest), Immanuel Wallerstein (Paris/Binghamton, NY), Zhou Liangxun (Beijing).

public support. Well-known scholars, politicians, artists and a lot of other persons from Germany, France, Italy, Britain, the Netherlands, Denmark, Russia, Japan and, last but not least, the USA endorsed its efforts.

Finally, the IMES achieved some success. As far as Germany was concerned, after a long period of uncertainty it was decided, notably by Chancellor Helmut Kohl himself, that the MEGA should be continued, though only on a scale which is usual with projects of this kind in Western countries. Thus, seven full-time paid posts were granted, and in 1993 the task of taking care of this team, consisting of former and new MEGA editors, was assigned to the new Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences (*Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften*, BBAW) in Berlin, which in turn formally joined the IMES.

Meanwhile, at the beginning of 1992, a second team, the German-French team, consisting of members of the staff of the Karl Marx House and members of the *Equipe de recherche en civilisation allemande* at the *Université de Provence* in Aix-en-Provence, had been created. Also, the situation in Moscow had become more stable in 1992. While a small number of the approximately twenty scholars who were left stayed at the so called Independent Institute (*Rossiiskii nezavisimyi institut sotsial'nykh i natsional'nykh problem*, RNISNP), the major part moved to the Archives, the so called Russian Centre (*Rossiiskii tsentr khraneniia i izucheniia dokumentov noveishei istorii*, RTsKhIDNI). Since 1992 both of these groups have been financed by the IISH, initially with support by the Dutch government and since 1995 with support by the European Union.

All in all, from 1992 on things took a promising turn. Thus, the IMES could at last focus its attention to its main task, the work on the MEGA. Above all, the Editorial Committee felt that the editorial principles of the MEGA should be examined closely. For this purpose an international conference was organized in Aix-en-Provence, France. It was attended by members of the IMES bodies, former and new editors and a number of prominent specialists in the field of editing. After lively debates new editorial principles were adopted. Taking the view that these principles should be known to the users of the MEGA, the Editorial Committee decided to publish them.¹³

¹³ *Editionsrichtlinien der Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe (MEGA)* (Berlin, 1993). The volume also contains the former editorial guidelines, *ibid.*, pp. 121-239. Also see 'Die neuen Editionsrichtlinien der Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe [with a preface by Jacques Grandjone]', *MEGA-Studien*, 1994/1, pp. 32-59.

Further, the plan of the MEGA had to be revised. The former editors had planned more than 170 volumes. Such a size seemed out of all proportion. We had to try - and were pressed to try - to reduce the number of volumes. At the same time we did not want to give up the aim of completeness. "Completeness" can of course be defined in different ways. One might confine oneself to publishing only those works that were published during the lifetime of the author. As far as Marx is concerned, this would, however, be useless. As you know, Marx had great plans, but he completed only a relatively small part of the comprehensive work he had in mind, leaving a great quantity of drafts and notes. The whole of his published and unpublished writings document the process of his studies which was finished only by his death. It is not an accident that the great debates about Marx in the 20th century were stimulated specifically by writings which were neither published during Marx's lifetime nor, in their existing form, intended for publication, such as the second and third volumes of *Das Kapital*, the so called "Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844", the "German Ideology" and the "Grundrisse". One of the most important achievements of the MEGA will be that, in its second section, besides Engels's editions of Vols. 2 and 3 of *Das Kapital*, all of Marx's drafts, too, will be published.

It has been suggested that we might abstain from publishing excerpts and notes, which would fill some thirty volumes. But from what I just said, it will be clear that the excerpts and notes are an integral part - and even a very interesting part - of the whole work. They enable us to follow the creation of Marx's works from the books he read via his excerpts, showing what he found noteworthy in these books, to his first drafts.

Also, it has been suggested that we might abstain from publishing the letters, which would also fill some thirty volumes. Or we might omit at least the letters *to* Marx and Engels. But this suggestion, too, seems unacceptable. Marx and Engels corresponded with about 2,000 persons. About 4,000 letters *from* Marx and Engels and about 10,000 letters *to* them have been preserved. All these letters, pertaining to a period of sixty years (1835-1895), represent an important source of information about the history of the German and international labour movement, and about the history of ideas and cultural history in the 19th century. Nearly all the letters from Marx and Engels have been published, whereas most of the letters to them are still unpublished.¹⁴

There are other ways of tightening the project up. For instance, it is not necessary to reproduce everything completely in full. Also, the reproduction of the same document in various sections of the MEGA can be omitted. By these and other changes we succeeded in reducing the number of volumes to 114 (see Annex).¹⁵

¹⁴ See Georgij A. Bagaturija, 'Ein Gesamtverzeichnis des Marx-Engels-Briefwechsels', *MEGA-Studien*, 1996/2, pp. 113-117.

¹⁵ See Jacques Grandjonc and Jürgen Rojahn, 'Der revidierte Plan der Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe', *MEGA-Studien*, 1995/2, pp. 62-89.

In conclusion, I would like to say a few words on the current state of the MEGA. When the IMES was established in 1990, 43 volumes or partial volumes had been published,¹⁶ four other volumes or partial volumes, being already in print, appeared in 1991 and 1992.¹⁷ In addition to the four teams mentioned above, in 1997 four new teams were formed: a Japanese team, a Danish team, a German-Dutch team in Berlin/Amsterdam and a team in the US. Thus, at present there are the following teams:

- the BBAW team in Berlin, working on Vols. I/15, I/16, I/21, I/31, I/32, II/14, II/15, IV/10, IV/11 and IV/12,
- the German-French team in Trier/Aix-en-Provence, working on Vols. I/4, I/5 and I/6,
- the team at the RTsKhIDNI in Moscow, working on Vols. II/11, III/9, III/10, III/12, III/13, III/14, IV/3 and IV/5,
- the team at the RNISNP in Moscow, working on Vols. II/4.3, III/11, IV/22 and IV/28,
- a Japanese team, working on Vols. II/12 and II/13,
- a Danish team, working on Vol. III/30,
- a German-Dutch team in Berlin/Amsterdam, working on Vol. IV/14, and
- a team in the US, working on Vol. IV/27.

Further, two of the former teams at Humboldt University in Berlin, which continued the work voluntarily, are finishing Vols. IV/26 and IV/31, respectively. Another volume, Vol. I/28 (containing Marx's mathematical manuscripts), is being completed by two mathematicians from the *Université de Toulouse* in France.

Finally, the teams in Berlin, Trier and Moscow are working jointly on the volume containing an annotated list of the books once belonging to Marx and Engels which have been traced.

This year the first volume edited under the auspices of the IMES and according to its editorial guidelines, Vol. IV/3, will be published. Most of the texts included in this volume have not been published before. The volume contains a number of excerpts made by Marx from works of British, French, Italian, Spanish, Swiss, Dutch and German economists in the years 1844-

¹⁶ 14 volumes in section I (1-3, 10-13, 18, 22, 24-27, 29), 15 volumes or partial volumes in section II (1.1-2, 2, 3.1-6, 4.1, 5-9), 8 volumes in section III (1-8) and 6 volumes in section IV (1-2, 4, 6-8).

¹⁷ Vols. I/20, II/4.2, II/10, IV/9.

45. Some of these excerpts, and particularly those from the works of Boisguillebert, are closely connected with Marx's "Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts". Further, the volume includes Marx's notebook from the years 1844-47, containing the original version of his 1845 "Theses on Feuerbach".

Since 1994 the IMES has also published its own journal, *MEGA-Studien*,¹⁸ containing

- articles (in German, French and English) on
 - * the lives and works of Marx and Engels;
 - * their sources;
 - * the historical context, dissemination and influence of their writings;
- reports on work in progress on the edition;
- reviews of recent books, and
- reports of conferences and the activities of the IMES.

Thus, for the time being the situation seems to be not so bad. However, I would not like to give a too rosy picture, however. Were all of the volumes mentioned above to be published, there would still be 49 volumes left. Therefore, we would welcome the formation of new teams, for instance in Britain and the USA.

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