

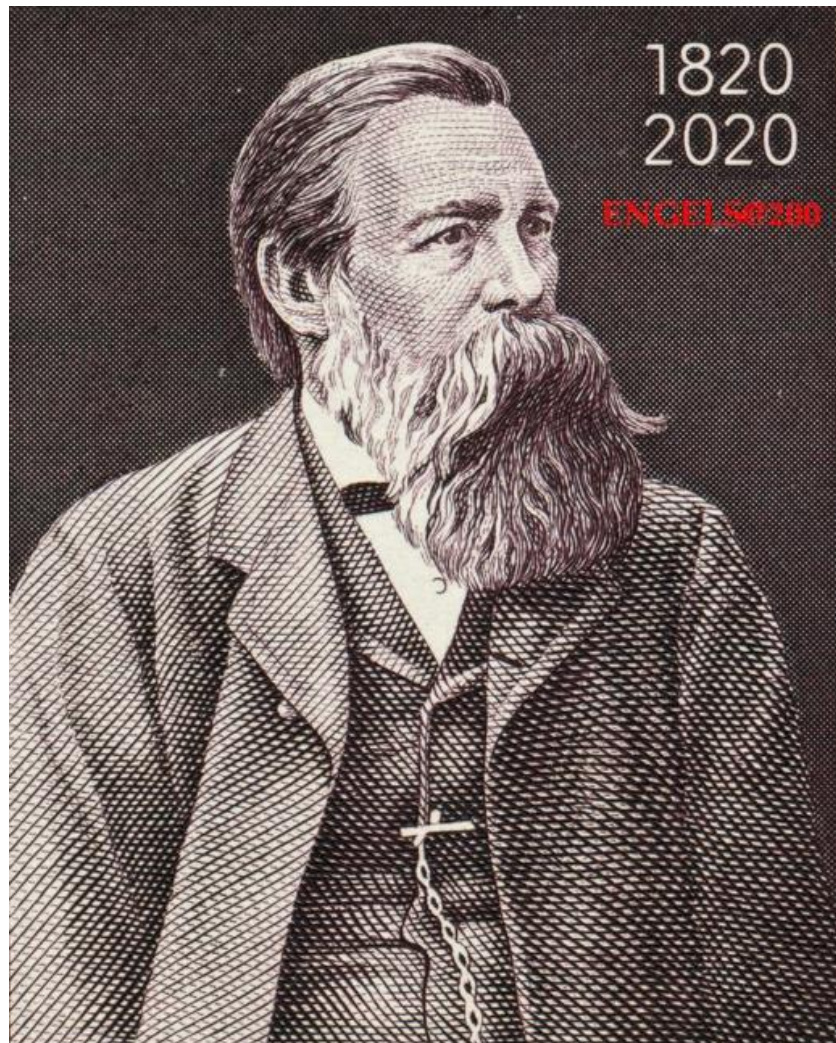
## Engels@200: Friedrich Engels in the Age of Digital Capitalism. Introduction.

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**Abstract:** This piece is the introduction to the special issue “Engels@200: Friedrich Engels in the Age of Digital Capitalism” that the journal tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique published on the occasion of Friedrich Engels’s 200<sup>th</sup> birthday on 28 November 2020. The introduction introduces Engels’s life and works and gives an overview of the special issue’s contributions.

**Keywords:** Friedrich Engels, 200<sup>th</sup> birthday, anniversary, digital capitalism, Karl Marx



## 1. Friedrich Engels's Life

Friedrich Engels was born on 28 November 1820 in Barmen, a city in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, that has since 1929 formed a district of the city Wuppertal. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Barmen was one of the most important manufacturing centres in the German-speaking world. He was the child of Elisabeth Franziska Mauritia Engels (1797-1873) and Friedrich Engels senior (1796-1860). The Engels family was part of the capitalist class and operated a business in the cotton manufacturing industry, which was one of the most important industries. In 1837, Engels senior created a business partnership with Peter Ermen called Ermen & Engels. The company operated cotton mills in Manchester (Great Britain) and Engelskirchen (Germany).

Other than Marx, Engels did not attend university because his father wanted him to join the family business so that Engels junior already at the age of 16 started an apprenticeship in commerce.

Starting in September 1841, Friedrich Engels for one year served as a one-year volunteer soldier in the Prussian Army in Berlin. During this time, he attended lectures by Schelling, who held Hegel's philosophy chair. Like Marx, Engels became a "Young Hegelian", which was the name used for the followers of Hegel's philosophy who provided a left-wing interpretation of this approach.

From late 1842 until summer 1844 he stayed in Manchester in order to work in his father's business. During this stay, Engels conducted research for his book *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Engels 1845b), built contacts to the League of the Just and the Chartist Movement, and met the Irish worker Mary Burns. Mary Burns (1821-1863) was Engels's partner until her death in 1863. After Mary's death, Friedrich Engels lived together in a partnership with her younger sister Lydia ("Lizzy", 1827-1878), whom he married one day before her death.

Marx and Engels first met in 1842. They became life-long friends, comrades, and collaborators when they again met for a ten-day period in Paris in August 1844. In 1847, Marx and Engels joined the League of the Just that was renamed to Communist League that commissioned the two thinkers to write the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*.

During the revolutionary times of 1848/1849, Engels contributed as journalist to the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, a radical democratic newspaper opposed to the monarchy and feudalism that was edited by Marx in Cologne. Engels actively participated in the revolutionary uprising against the Prussian regime in Elberfeld and Baden. After the defeat of the democratic revolution, Marx and Engels fled to England, where Engels started working for his father's company in 1850. He took over his father's management role in 1864. Engels junior hated work for the company because he did not share the capitalist worldview of the bourgeoisie. He saw the role as a strategic opportunity that allowed him to earn enough money for being able to fund Marx's research time and the socialist movement. In 1869, Engels left the company and the payout he received from selling his company share allowed him to fund his and Marx's work and the socialist movement until his death. He from then on dedicated his time to the socialist cause and socialist research.

In 1870, Engels moved to London so that he lived closer to Marx. Also in 1870, he became a member of the council of the First International (International Workingmen's Association). After Marx's death in 1883, Engels became the intellectual leader of the international communist movement. Given that Engels and Marx's daughters Eleanor and Laura were after Marx' deaths the only people alive who were able to read Marx's terrible handwriting, Engels devoted the majority of his time to editing volumes 2 and

3 of *Capital*. Volume 2 was first published in 1885 and in a second edition in 1893. Volume 3 was first published in 1894. *Capital's* first volume had been published in 1867 and its second edition in 1872/1873. The French translation that contained many important editorial changes made by Marx had been published in 1875. Engels edited and published *Volume 1's* third (1883) and fourth (1890) German editions as well as the first English translation that was published in 1886/1887. Marxist and non-Marxist critics of Engels often point out that Engels' editorial work vulgarised and distorted the meaning of Marx's *Capital*. But there is little evidence that Engels' additions and changes resulted in substantial changes of the meaning of what Marx wrote down in the manuscripts of *Capital* (see Fülberth 2020; Hecker 2018, 52-66, especially 64-66; Kopf 2017, 106-107). Without Engels's editorial work, there would be no second and third volume of *Capital*. Engels improved the readability of *Capital Volume 2 and 3* but did not change the theoretical meanings at the semantic level.

If Engels [...] had committed forgeries, for example in the third volume of 'Capital', then the first publication in 1992 of Marx's main manuscript from the third rough draft of the 'Critique of Political Economy' in MEGA<sup>2</sup> Volume II/4.2 should have triggered a great flood of new, better solutions or presentations. But they do not exist, although more than two decades have passed. [...] Without Engels' great theoretical and methodological abilities, Marx would be a forgotten among other writers of the 19th century. Thanks to Engels, Marx's 'Capital' lives on in human memory throughout the centuries! (Kopf 2017, 106-107, 109, translation from German).

Suffering from cancer of the throat, Friedrich Engels died aged at the age of 74 on 5 August 1895.

## 2. Friedrich Engels's Work and Works

Engels on the one hand was the organiser and “manager” of Marx's intellectual works. On the other hand, he himself made important intellectual contributions to socialist theory. Engels together with Marx wrote the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, *The German Ideology*, and *The Holy Family*. Engels also helped out Marx with writing newspaper articles that appeared under Marx's name. And he made a genuine contribution to critical theory with works such as *Anti-Schelling (Schelling and Revelation)*, *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy*, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, *The Housing Question*, *Anti-Dühring*, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, *Dialectics of Nature*; *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*; *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*.

At the age of 19, Engels (1839) published *Letters from Wuppertal* that documented the conditions the working class in Germany. Attending Schelling's lectures in Berlin, Engels published a series of three philosophical works that criticised Schelling's approach and defended Hegel against Schelling: *Schelling on Hegel* (Engels 1841), *Schelling and Revelation: Critique of the Latest Attempt of Reaction against the Free Philosophy* (Engels 1842a), *Schelling, Philosopher in Christ* (Engels 1842b). In 1843, Engels (1843) published the essay *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy*, a foundational text of Marx's and Engels's approach to and critique of political economy, in which he formulated a critique of classical political economy. Marx (1859, 264) characterised the *Outlines* as “brilliant essay on the critique of economic categories” and directly referred to it several times in *Capital Volume I* (Marx 1867, 168 [footnote 30], 253 [footnote 5], 266-267 [footnote 20], 788 [footnote 15]). Michael Roberts (2020, 29)

characterises the *Outlines* as “the first pioneering work of what we now call Marxian economics”, where for the first time foundations of a Marxist theory of value were formulated.

Marx and Engels first joint works were *The Holy Family, or Critique of Critical Criticism. Against Bruno Bauer and Company* (Marx and Engels 1845) and *The German Ideology. Critique of Modern German Philosophy According to Its Representatives Feuerbach, B. Bauer and Stirner, and of German Socialism According to Its Various Prophets* (Marx and Engels 1845/1846). They wrote these manuscripts as a clarification of their own position towards contemporary German philosophy. Marx wrote the vast part of *The Holy Family*, but the book just like *The German Ideology* emerged from the joint thinking and discussions of Marx and Engels. The overall goal of both works was a critique of the contemporary left-wing thought of the 1840s as too much focused on the critique of ideas and religion. Marx and Engels argued for developing leftist critique towards a critique of capitalism and in doing so created foundations of a critical theory of ideology, capitalism, and communism. They focused their critique on the approaches of Carl Reichardt, Jules Faucher, Ernst Jungnitz, Edgar Bauer, Franz Zychlin von Zychlinski (“Szeliga”), Bruno Bauer, Ludwig Feuerbach, Max Stirner, Karl Grün, and Georg Kuhlmann. *Holy Family* was published as book in 1845. Marx and Engels did not find a publisher for *German Ideology*. The entire book was first published in 1932 as part of the first German Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe (MEGA<sup>1</sup>).

In February 1845, Engels (1845a) gave two speeches in Elberfeld as part of communist gatherings led by Moses Hess, who was Germany’s leading communist in the 1830s and 1840s and had major influence on Marx and Engels. Engels spoke about how communism differs from capitalism.

Engels conducted the research for his book *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (CWCE = Engels 1845b) during his stay in Manchester from 1842 until 1844, where he was supposed to learn his father’s trade. Engels directly experienced the working class’ conditions in England and got in touch with workers, from whom he learned about their everyday life and the problems they faced. In CWCE, Engels analyses the rise, early development and consequences of capitalism in England. The decisive features he mentions are a) the working class, b) industrial technologies such as the steam-engine as moving technology and manufacturing machinery as working technology that replaced handicraft, c) the capitalist class, and d) the division of labour.

In CWCE, Engels analyses the terrible conditions that the working class had to endure in industrial England, including long working hours, low wages, poverty, overcrowded and dirty slums and dwellings, poisonous and uneatable food, overwork, starvation, death by hunger, lack of sleep, air pollution, untreated illnesses, egotism and moral indifference, crime, alcoholism, bad clothes, unemployment, rape, homelessness, lack of clean water, drainage and sanitation, illiteracy, child labour, military drill in factories, overseers’ flogging and maltreatment of workers, deadly work accidents, fines, etc.

Using factory inspectors’ reports, parliamentary reports, observation, and the analysis of news reports, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* shows that Engels already in the 1840s practiced and pioneered empirical social research (Kurz 2020, 67; Krätke 2020, 29-34; Zimmermann 2020). In *Capital Volume 1*, Marx (1867) uses the same empirical method as Engels in CWCE, which shows that Engels’s work had large influence on Marx. Marx (1867, 349 (footnote 15), 573, 755) explicitly refers positively to Engels’s book several times. Working on *Capital*, Marx re-read Engels’s *Condition* and wrote to him about the book: “With what zest and passion, what boldness of

vision and absence of all learned or scientific reservations, the subject is still attacked in these pages!” (Marx 1863, 469).

Marx and Engels’ (1848) *Manifesto of the Communist Party* has been their most influential work. Published on the eve of the 1848 revolutions, the Manifesto outlines the critique of class society and capitalism, introduces different forms of socialism and introduces foundations of communism. Draft of a Communist Confession of Faith (Engels 1847a) and Principles of Communism (Engels 1847b) were pre-works and drafts written by Engels that Marx used as foundations for writing the text of the *Manifesto* (Marx and Engels 1848). Eric Hobsbawm (2011) writes that the *Manifesto* “was almost certainly by far the most influential single piece of political writing since the French Revolutionary *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*” (102) and that it “still has plenty to say to the world in the twenty-first century” (107).

Engels specialised on and over the course of his life again and again wrote about wars and military strategy. Examples are his works *The Peasant War in Germany* (Engels 1850), *Po and Rhine* (Engels 1859), *Notes on the War* (Engels 1870/1871), or *Can Europe Disarm?* (Engels 1893). At the end of his life, Engels anticipated the First World War and stressed the need for general disarmament as potential way out. “For the past twenty-five years all Europe has been arming on a hitherto unprecedented scale. Every major power is seeking to surpass another in military might and readiness for war. [...] Is there no way out of this blind alley except through a war of destruction such as the world has never seen? I maintain: disarmament and thus a guarantee of peace is possible” (Engels 1893, 372).

In *The Housing Question*, Engels (1872) criticised Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s approach to social policy and pointed out that the housing problem that the working-class faces is inherent to capitalism. Almost 150 years later, housing remains a key problem of capitalism as the financialisation of housing and its role in the 2008 capitalist crisis showed.

In 1878, Engels (1878) published *Anti-Dühring. Herr Eugen Dühring’s Revolution in Science*. Eugen Dühring (1833-1921) was a German theorist who was influential in the Social Democratic Workers’ Party of Germany, critical of Marx, and embraced positivism, anti-Semitism, and racism. In *Anti-Dühring*, Engels outlines foundations of dialectical-materialist philosophy, the critique of political economy, and socialism. Marx wrote the tenth chapter of the books’ part on political economy. Parts of *Anti-Dühring* that focused on utopian socialism, dialectics, and historical materialism were first published (in French) in 1880 under the title *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (Engels 1880). In the 1870s and 1880s, Engels worked on materials about the dialectics of nature. The work remained unfinished and was first published in 1925 under the title *Dialectics of Nature* (Engels 1925). In 1886, Engels (1888) published *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* in the socialist journal *Die Neue Zeit*. In 1888, the work was published as a separate book.

Lenin (1913, 24) characterised Engels’s *Ludwig Feuerbach* and *Anti-Dühring* as “handbooks for every class-conscious worker”. In the Soviet Union and in orthodox communist parties and movements, reading these works by Engels often was a substitute for engaging with Marx’s writings and the entire oeuvre of Marx and Engels. Stalinism eulogised elements from some of Engels’s works. In his essay “Dialectical and Historical Materialism” published in the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Bolsheviks: Short Course* – the ideological bible of Stalinism –, Stalin (1945) references and quotes from Engels’s *Anti-Dühring*, *Dialectics of Nature*, and *Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*.

For Stalin, socialism as science does not mean a science of society that is different from the natural sciences, but deterministic and mechanical social laws of nature operating in society. The implication is for Stalin that history develops in a linear manner, it is for him a “process of development from the lower to the higher” (Stalin 1939, 109). Stalin argues that the Soviet Union followed capitalism and therefore was a socialist system: “[T]he U.S.S.R. has already done away with capitalism and has set up a Socialist system” (Stalin 1945, 119). His implication was that anyone critical of him was bourgeois and anti-socialist. The mechanical interpretation of the dialectic legitimated Stalin’s terror against his opponents.

The concepts of *Aufhebung* (sublation) and the negation of the negation are missing in Stalinist dialectics. They are however key features of Engels’s dialectics. Stalin referred to Engels, but Engels’s interpretation of dialectics was other than Stalin’s not based on mechanical and deterministic concepts. Engels is not to be blamed for Stalinism (see Liedman 2018, 467-525). For Engels, dialectics operates in nature, consciousness, and society. These dialectics are connected but not the same. In society, there are conscious human actors who act and struggle based on intentions and interests that cannot always be realised as planned because society is complex and dynamic. For Engels just like for Marx, history is the history of class struggles. “In modern history at least it is, therefore, proved that all political struggles are class struggles, and all class struggles for emancipation, despite their necessarily political form – for every class struggle is a political struggle – turn ultimately on the question of economic emancipation” (Engels 1888, 387-388, 391). Scientific socialism does not mean for Engels that society develops based on natural laws and mechanical determinism. Rather, society has its own dialectical logic. It is one of the laws of society that change happens through human practices and that in class society, class struggle is the decisive practice of transformation.

The operation of dialectics in nature means that nature has the capacity to produce itself – nature is a complex, dynamic, self-producing system (Fuchs 2003). In society, the dynamic character of production is based on conscious, social actions of human beings who are producing, social, conscious, thinking, creative, moral, anticipatory-imaginative (i.e. capable of imagining the future and acting based on such anticipations) beings. Society is based on a dialectic of human practices and structures, in which human processes of social production play a key role. The dialectic of production and communication is another dialectic through which humans shape society (Fuchs 2020). Humans engage in a metabolism with nature, which means that there is a nature-society-dialectic (Fuchs 2006), where humans live based on nature and shape and transform nature. The specific dialectics that are at play in society include the dialectic of human practices and social structures, the dialectic of production and communication, the dialectic of nature and society, and the dialectic of human freedom and structural necessity/conditioning. Society and humanity are a particular form of the existence of matter that have their own, specific manifestation of dialectical principles with emergent qualities. Society and human beings cannot be reduced to nature. They are part of nature and have emergent qualities. Society is a sublation (*Aufhebung*) of nature (Fuchs 2006).

Elmar Altvater (2015; 2016, 150) argues that Engels’ dialectical approach to nature and society anticipated red-green socialist thought. What Altvater and others term the Capitalocene, the subsumption of nature under capital, Engels (1925) reminds us, only appears as “human victories over nature” (460) in the first place, but in the “second and third places [...] has quite different, unforeseen effects which only too often cancel

the first” (461). The climate crisis is such an unforeseen, negative effect of the Capitalocene that reminds us of the circumstance that humans “by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature – but that we, with flesh, blood and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst “ (Engels 1925, 461).

Engels also conducted multiple historical studies. We can just mention two of them. In *On the History of Early Christianity*, Engels (1894) analysed early Christianity as a movement of the oppressed, including slaves and the poor, and draws parallels to the modern working-class movement. In his book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* that was first published in 1884, Engels (1891) analyses the history and historical origins of the family, class, and the state. He based his analysis on the studies of the American anthropologist Lewis H. Morgan. Engels (1891, 131) argues that according “to the materialist conception, the determining factor in history is, in the last resort, the production and reproduction of immediate life”, that reproduction such as housework is an important aspect of the economy and material life, and that patriarchy was history’s first class relation:

In an old unpublished manuscript, the work of Marx and myself in 1846, I find the following: ‘The first division of labour is that between man and woman for child breeding’. And today I can add: The first class antithesis which appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamian marriage, and the first class oppression with that of the female sex by the male” (Engels 1891, 173).

Language	Marx’s original manuscript	Engels’ 1894 edition
<b>German original</b>	„( [...] Dieser Proceß würde bald die kapitalistische Production zum Klappen bringen, wenn nicht widerstrebende Tendenzen beständig wieder decentralisirend neben der centripetalen Kraft wirkten.)” (Marx 1863-1865a, 315).	„Dieser Prozeß würde bald die kapitalistische Produktion zum Zusammenbruch bringen, wenn nicht widerstrebende Tendenzen beständig wieder dezentralisierend neben der zentripetalen Kraft wirkten” (Marx 1894a, 256).
<b>English translation</b>	“This process of divorce of the conditions of labour from the producers (which would soon shake capitalist production if counteracting tendencies were not constantly at work alongside this centripetal force, in the direction of decentralisation)” (Marx 1863-1865b, 350)	“This process would soon bring about the collapse of capitalist production if it were not for counteracting tendencies, which have a continuous de-centralising effect alongside the centripetal one”. (Marx 1894b, 245).  “This process would entail the rapid breakdown of capitalist production, if counter acting tendencies were not constantly at work alongside this centripetal force, in the direction of decentralization (Marx 1894c, 355).

Table 1: A passage from *Capital Volume 3* about the tendential fall in the rate of profit

Engels's analysis of patriarchy has been influential on and led to discussions in Marxist and socialist feminism (e.g. Barrett 1980, 48-49, 131-132; Eisenstein 1979; Federici 2012, 1; Fraser and Jaeggi 2018, 32; Gimenez 1987; Haug 2015; Leacock 2008, 13-29; Notz 2020; Rowbotham 1973, 47; Sayers, Evans and Redclift 1987; Vogel 1996).

Without Engels' editorial work there would be no second and third volume of *Capital*. Engels was one of the few people who was able to read Marx's terrible handwriting. After Marx's death in 1883, Engels spent the last twelve years of his own life on editing Marx's manuscripts, which resulted in volumes two and three of *Capital*.

Some observers and analysts claim that Engels vulgarised Marx's works and distorted the content of Marx's original manuscripts. Two examples follow that refer to a passage in chapter 15 of *Capital Volume 3*, where we find a discussion of the internal contradictions of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. Table 1 shows the German and English versions of this passage and both what Marx's wrote in the original German manuscript and Engels's version of it. The passage focuses on the impacts of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall on capitalist production and the role of the countervailing tendencies that are discussed in chapter 14.

Michael Heinrich's analysis of this passage is the first example. Carl-Erich Vollgraf's and Jürgen Jungnickel's analysis is the second example. Heinrich is a representative of the Neue Marx-Lektüre approach (New Marx Reading) that goes back to the works of Helmut Reichelt and Hans-Georg Backhaus, Vollgraf and Jungnickel are two of the editors of the second Marx/Engels Gesamtausgabe (*MEGA*<sup>2</sup>).

Authors such as Backhaus (1997) argue that Engels in his preface to and materials accompanying the third volume of *Capital* argues incorrectly that Marx in the chapter 1.3's value form analysis describe a historical development from simple commodity production to capitalism (for this discussion, see also Hecker 2018, 189-206). In reality, Marx would have provided an analysis of the logic of capital. Engels' misunderstanding would have grounded an evolutionary and mechanistic interpretation of Marx typical for Soviet Marxism, in which the identity of the historical and the logical moment of capital(ism) implies that the crisis-ridden nature of capitalism that is part of its antagonistic logic results in its natural law-like historical breakdown and the rise of communism. Marx certainly provides an analysis of capital(ism)'s dialectical logic, but he sees capital as historical system whose development is shaped by praxis, many historical examples form part of the analysis (see also Haug 2003). Engels's interpretation in prefaces and accompanying materials do not imply that he is the inventor of Stalinist and revisionist evolutionism.

Heinrich (2006, 360, footnote 55), argues that Engels' substitution of the term „Klappen“ (folding) by „Zusammenbruch“ (breakdown, collapse) enabled Henryk Grossman and others to claim that Marx saw “immanent breakdown tendencies” (translation from German) of capitalism. Heinrich (2006, 359 [translation from German]) writes that Engels “exacerbated” („verschärft“) Marx's formulations. Vollgraf and Jungnickel (2002, 62), in a manner comparable to Heinrich, claim:

One word correction by Engels had a big effect on the reception. In discussing the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, Marx had stated in parentheses that centralization would cause capitalist production to ‘shake,’ if there were no countervailing effects. Engels, who as mentioned broke Marx's continuous exposition into subsections, removed these parentheses, made the idea the final sentence of the introductory subpoint he titled ‘1. General,’ and replaced ‘shake’ with ‘collapse,’ with an eye to his own purposes. By just this one editorial intervention,



Engels probably gave sustenance (e.g., with Bebel) to the breakdown expectations widespread in the Second International (as in Kautsky), and also gave a boost to the debate over whether Marx had a breakdown theory.

The English translations are somewhat imprecise. In fact, the only changes that Engels made are that he removed the parenthesis and substituted the German term „Klappen” by „Zusammenbruch”. The English translation of „Klappen” as “shake” is imprecise. According to the Oxford English Dictionary German/English, the precise translation is “to fold”<sup>1</sup>. Marx probably had the English term “folding” or “collapse” in mind when writing the sentence in question and translated it as „Klappen”. But in German to speak of „Klappen” of a system is very uncommon, which is why Engels seems to have used the more common term „Zusammenbruch”. “Engels thus replaced a rather colloquial expression from oral language (‘Klappen’) - which even today would seem strange e.g. in a scientific text - by a more term (‘Zusammenbruch’) that is more common in written form” (Fülberth 2018, 107, translation from German).

In the English language, according to the Oxford Dictionary one of the meanings of the verb “to fold” is that something economic is ceasing “trading or operating as a result of financial problems”<sup>2</sup>. Engels’s editorial change is feasible and does not change the meaning of the sentence. Neither Engels’s edition of the passage nor Marx’s original wording imply that capitalism automatically collapses because the key point is that Marx says that there are counteracting tendencies so that there is a dialectic of the tendency of breakdown and the tendency of stabilisation in the capitalist economy. This dialectic results in crises, from which capitalism can recover if the capitalist class manages to succeed in class struggles against the proletariat by various measures (that Marx calls “countervailing tendencies”, „entgegenwirkende Ursachen”) such as lowering wages, increasing the rate of exploitation, cheapening constant capital, etc.

Authors such as Heinrich, Vollgraf, and Jungnickel, who follow particular interpretations of Marx and Engels, blame Engels for having introduced a breakdown theory to Marx, while in reality Engels did not change the meaning of Marx’s writing, but he simply used a German term that is more common and better understandable, but expresses the same meaning. „klappen” and „zusammenbrechen” have quite similar German meanings in respect to an economic system. Engels was a thorough, organised, and systematic intellectual worker, who made an important original contribution to socialist theory. Without his support of Marx and his editorial work, there would be no *Capital* at all.

Functionalist Marxists such as Henryk Grossmann, who assumed that capitalism would automatically break down, interpreted the passage in question from *Capital Volume 3* as breakdown law of capitalism (Grossmann 1979, 79). Even if Engels had left the term „klappen” instead of „Zusammenbruch”, Grossmann and others would have made the same interpretation. The absolute breakdown is an (incorrect) interpretation of Marx and Engels that can neither be found in Marx’s original manuscripts nor in Engels’ edition.

Marx and Engels stress the importance of the structural conditions of class struggles in society, capitalism, and history. Capitalism’s antagonisms again and again result in crises, but the results of these crises are relatively open because class struggle is an element of conditioned and relative chance whose results are not determined in

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.linguee.com/english-german/search?source=auto&query=klappen+>, accessed on 4 August 2020.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.lexico.com/definition/fold>, accessed on 4 August 2020.

advance. In editing *Capital Volumes 2 and 3*, Engels “did a solid job of interpreting Marx’s drafts and there was no real distortion” (Roberts 2020, 110).

### 3. The *tripleC*-Special Issue “Engels@200: Friedrich Engels in the Age of Digital Capitalism”

November 28, 2020, marks the 200<sup>th</sup> birthday of Friedrich Engels. *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique* celebrates Engels’ birthday with a special issue, in which critical theorists reflect on the relevance of Engels’ works for the analysis of digital and communicative capitalism. The special issue’s contributions provide perspectives that address the question: How do Friedrich Engels’ works matter for the critical analysis of digital and communicative capitalism?

The contributions deal with questions such as:

- How do the digital conditions of the working class look like today?
- What are digital working class struggles and how do they operate?
- What is the role of reproductive labour, including digital housework and digital housewifisation, in digital capitalism?
- What are Engels’ contributions to a Marxist-humanist critique of digital capitalism?
- What is digital scientific socialism? What are the roles of theory, empirical research, and the critique of positivism in digital scientific socialism?
- What is digital dialectics? How does digital dialectics matter for critical digital social research? How does digital dialectics differ from the dialectics of nature?
- How do Engels’ critiques of Schelling and/or Feuerbach and/or Bruno Bauer matter for the analysis of digital capitalism?
- What principles of digital commons are there and how do they matter today?
- How can we make sense of digital utopias today?

**Christian Fuchs**’s article holds the title “Engels@200: Friedrich Engels and Digital Capitalism. How Relevant Are Engels’s Works 200 Years After His Birth?”. He discusses the relevance of Engels’ works for the critique of the political economy of digital capitalism. The paper discusses how to think of scientific socialism as critical social science today, presents a critique of computational social science as digital positivism, engages with foundations of digital labour analysis, the analysis of the international division of digital labour, updates Engels’s *Condition of the Working Class in England* in the age of digital capitalism in order to analyse the digital conditions of the working class today, analyses the role of trade unions and digital class struggles in digital age, analyses the social murder of workers in the COVID-19 crisis, engages with platform co-operatives, digital commons projects and public service Internet platforms are concrete digital utopias that point beyond digital capital(ism).

In the paper “Engels’s Theory of Social Murder and the Spectacle of Fascism: A Critical Enquiry into Digital Labour and its Alienation”, **Aishik Saha** argues that criticism of Christian Fuchs’s critical theory of digital labour are short-sighted. The author utilises Engels’s concept of social murder in order to make this point and to analyse how digital capitalism has supported the emergence of new forms and platforms of fascism. Saha stresses the fascist potentials of capitalism and argues that in the age of digital capitalism, social murder takes on the form of the interaction of violence and the spectacle that underpin the emergence of fascism.

In the article “Digital Capitalism and Coal Mine Workers”, **Akın Bakioglu** re-visits Engels’s *The Condition of the Working Class in England* for the analysis of the working conditions of miners in digital capitalism. The author stresses that physical resources such as coal remain of crucial importance in digital capitalism. The analysis shows the

specific characteristics of mine labour such as labour-intensity, a low degree of mechanisation, and highly dangerous, high-risk labour. The author shows how the profits of digital corporation is built on the blood, sweat and tears of mine workers and stresses the importance of strikes as means of resistance.

In the article “Revisiting Friedrich Engels’s *Dialectics of Nature* in an Age of Digital Idealism”, **Christopher Leslie** rereads and renews Engels’s *Dialectics of Nature* in the context of contemporary science and technology, especially STEM research. He argues that the dominant approach in STEM research is idealist in character. The article reminds us that Engels’s dialectical thought enables us to understand science and technology in the context of and in interrelationship with society and capitalism. Engels has influenced the development of a critical, dialectical theory of science, technology and society.

In the article “Break or Continuity? Friedrich Engels and the Critique of Digital Surveillance”, **Dimitrios Kivotidis** analyses how Engels’s works can inspire the critique of surveillance. The author takes Engels as inspiration for criticizing Shoshanna Zuboff’s analysis that “surveillance capitalism” means a radical break in the development of capitalism. The article also points out foundations of a Marxian and Engelsian critique of surveillance. Such analyses stress the importance of the interconnection of surveillance and the relations of production.

In their article “The Digital Economy of the Sourdough: Housewifisation and Exploitation as Self-Exploitation”, **Julianna Faludi and Michelle Crosby** re-actualise Engels with the help of a feminist analysis of housewifisation and digital capitalism in the COVID-19 crisis. The authors frame the analysis by a reading of Engels’s *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. The authors point out that digital capitalism has amplified the commodification of sexuality. The article analyses changes of online dating, violence against women, the division of labour, childcare, housework, the convergence of the home and the workplace, digital communication, as well as alienation in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.

**Klaus Fuchs-Kittowski**’s article is titled “On the Categories of Possibility, Limiting Conditions and the Qualitative Development Stages of Matter in the Thought of Friedrich Engels”. It revisits and updates Engels’s dialectical philosophy. The author presents a stage model of the evolution of matter and updates dialectical philosophy in the context of information theory, self-organisation theory, and quantum physics. Dialectical philosophy is opposed to mechanical, reductionist thinking and logic. In the age of digital technologies and surveillance/digital capitalism, mechanistic materialism and the reduction of humans to the level of machines and things poses dangers such as a new world war and a new fascism. Fuchs-Kittowski argues that dialectical humanism advances a logic opposed to these developments by focusing on the dialectics of chance and necessity and stressing that human practices are based on conscious decision-making, conscious self-control, creativity, and freedom.

**Saayan Chattopadhyay and Suhmita Pandit**’s article holds the title “Freedom, Distribution and Work from Home: Rereading Engels in the Time of the COVID-19-Pandemic”. The paper analyses work from home in the COVID-19 crisis based on Friedrich Engels’s works. It gives special attention to software companies’ work from home policies and the situation in developing countries such as India. Based on Engels’s analysis of the housing question and the social question in capitalism, the authors show what problems digital workers have faced when working from home and what special problems workers have faced in developing countries.

**Shahram Azhar's** paper holds the title "The Conditions of the Global Digital Working Class: The Continuing Relevance of Friedrich Engels to Theorising Platform Labour". It shows the relevance of Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England* for the analysis of crowdlabour in digital capitalism. The author focuses especially on showing how Engels' analyses of class relations, inter-worker competition, labour contracts, management, surplus-population, racism, patriarchy matter for understanding the critical political economy of crowdlabour today.

**Suddhabrata Deb Roy's** article focuses on "The Political Economy of Working-Class Social Media Commerce: Digital Capitalism and the Engelsian Concept of Working-Class 'Property'". The author re-visits Engels's concept of property and re-actualises the Engelsian analysis of property in the context of social media. The paper presents an empirical case study, namely how Facebook is used as platform for primarily organising commodity resales (second hand sales) in Dunedin, the second-largest city located on New Zealand's South Island. The paper shows how capitalism is forcing the working class to resell its property via platforms such as Facebook.

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