

Engels and the origin of Marxism

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Abstract: This article intends to present a thesis that, although published, is of utmost importance to clarify the path of cultural strand associated to the name of Marx. This thesis, certainly very controversial, indicates the difference of philosophical conception between Marx and Engels. Their close friendship, intense collaboration and the way Engels contributed to publicize his friend's name and works after his death, besides the limited knowledge on their set of writings, for some time led to the belief that they were complementary thinkers. Nowadays, however, there are studies showing the differences between these two remarkable revolutionary thinkers, and about Engels as the effective founder of Marxism as an ideology of labour movement in 19th-century. The importance Engels saw in philosophy and natural sciences took him to search for a Monist view of world (*weltanschauung*), from which men's social life is only a part, also subject to the similar laws submitted to the same laws, which motion would have been appointed by Hegel. Engels strongly emphasizes materialism rather than dialectics, this way providing a basis for a determinist and economics view of human social life. Marx, on his turn, emphasizes the dialectical movement of reality, a new dialectics, not a Hegelian one.

Keywords: Engels, Marx, dialectics, Marxism, materialism, economics.

Introduction

Engels (1820-1895) and Marx (1818-1883) were great friends and intellectual collaborators for almost forty years. This relationship started at the impact of Engels's paper *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy* (1844) on Marx until the moment the death came for the author of *Capital*. We could even say that this intellectual link still persisted in the twelve years Engels outlived Marx. Although Engels himself had suggested the need for criticizing the political economy of capital and also had definitely stated the utmost importance of the industrial proletariat for the process of human emancipation, he left the task of deepening into this crucial issue for Marx's efforts.

Thus, we can say that there might have been a certain division of work and attention between the partners, with Engels dwelling much on the history of Germanic people, criticism of religion, military themes, and history of natural sciences. But even this statement is probably nothing but appearance or only a first approach, because the systematic study of the relationship of the two authors is extremely complex and requires an accurate philological study, which is still ongoing.

The forty years of common work has implied a permanent movement of reciprocal help, dialogue, and clarification, not always completed. There were few texts signed by both, the first one of them was *The Holy Family* (1845), which formally opened the collaboration between them. *The German Ideology* (1846), a set of texts intended to be a self-clarification of theoretical issues presented before, was never conceived as a book, but as a set of articles to be published in a journal that never came to light (Fineschi 2019).

It is well known that *The Communist Manifesto* was written by Marx, who made use of Engels' previous texts and might have heard his opinions. Today we know the fact that Engels was the writer of the text signed by Marx about the German Revolution of 1848, as well as that Engels's suggestions in letters were absorbed by Marx when writing texts, which would compose the work *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (1852). Marx has made all the critical study of political economy, but under constant dialogue with Engels. For immediate political reasons, both of them had signed texts together, both might have written collective political documents, together or separate, etc.

The huge difficulties to effectively define how this decisive dialogue took place are then understandable, as well as certain cleavages that had arisen in the reflection on these remarkable revolutionary 19th-century thinkers. There is still much to prove and elaborate regarding this issue. The objective of this paper is by far more limited and modest: it is only to raise some elements to be duly delved into on what we could define as 'The Last Engels', or 'Engels after Marx'.

The emerging issue at this particular moment is to clarify Engels's role in organizing and spreading Marx's works, and how this action implied a certain re-reading or re-elaboration of Marx's thoughts, as well as contributed to spread and simplify Marx's contributions, and finally whether it contributed or not for the emergence of *orthodox Marxism* and *Revisionism*. The answer to this problem demands an extensive philological study requiring the contribution of many scholars: a work focused on articles and books written by Engels, including more than one thousand letters sent to many interlocutors, on how he organized and presented Marx's texts.

Although essential, such philological study would not replace an analysis of the concrete historical situation, once it only complements and clarifies it. The particular historical situation of Capitalism in Germany, Engels's political positions in the context of both German and international labor movement, the international relations at the beginnings of the imperialist era - these are important elements which contribute to the understanding of Engels's political theory, the revolutionary strategy of the new phase and the relation that was determined by Marx's works.

The debate about the intellectual relationship between Engels and Marx has a long history, which involves the meaning and value of its contribution on Engels' specific work. The discussion was (and still is) quite fierce. Terrell Carver, Paul Thomas and others (1999), including John Holloway (2003), are prominent authors who have been criticizing Engels' work, given the scientificist or objectivist character of many of his writings which relatively disregards the role of subjectivity. Perhaps Norman Levine (1975) may have been the one who has separated Engels from Marx, roughly putting apart the brilliant friend from *Capital's* author.

Other important contributors, such as John Bellamy Foster and Paul Blackledge, have taken on the mission of defending Engels's work and heritage. This was mainly due to derogatory criticisms and conclusions against one of the greatest intellectuals of the 19th century, with arguments that highlight Engels' insights on the importance of work for human evolution or the emphasis on human insertion in the natural environment. Both parties make reasonable points, but possibly these are excessively "partisan". The general thesis of this paper starts from the obviousness: it is about two real people who have developed a congruent study agenda, in a collaborative way, but also with particularities, among which we can observe remarkable differences in philosophical and methodological aspects.

From the foundation of SPD to Marx's death

The International Workingmen's Association (IWMA) had arisen in 1864 from the convergence of French and English groups of workers and had further spread with some difficulties to other nations. The defeat of Paris Commune and the formation of German Empire (1871) fundamentally changed the "geopolitics" of the European labor movement and started the decline of IWMA. Even with a minor influence on the German labor movement, as demonstrated at the strongest period of IWMA, Marx and Engels were increasingly interested in the situation of a new State, which had just emerged in central Europe.

Along the 1860s, the German labor movement was divided into two main branches: the one organized around ADAV, the General German Workers' Association (ADAV, Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiter-Verein), of Ferdinand Lassalle, who saw the alliance with Prussianism as a way of national unification against bourgeoisie, and the VDAV, the Federation of German Workingmen's Clubs (VDAV, Vereinstag Deutscher Arbeitervereine), of August Bebel, who considered the importance of the alliance with anti-feudal and anti-Prussian bourgeoisie. In 1869, disregarding the route of unification of Germany around Prussia, the Social Democratic Workers Party was founded, gathering August Bebel's federation and some members from ADAV. This party broke up with the People's Party, in which many of its members were acting ever since, and took an internationalist stand, further proved by their practices during the Franco-Prussian War and Paris Commune. There was then an approach with the stands taken by Engels and Marx.

The worker's struggle, which arose as soon the long-lasting capitalist crisis came up, in a brand new institutional political situation, brought together the bases of the existent trade union and political groups. In the early 1875, the agreement to merge the German labor organizations was sealed, but only in March Engels and Marx had access to the program outlined for the new party. Their astonishment was such that both of them declared to be inclined to publicly dissociate from that political ongoing articulation.

Engels drew attention to the decisive theoretical concessions made to Lasalleanism, which resulted in real contradictions in the text. The program also incorporates - Engels observes in a letter addressed to Auguste Bebel - the fake Lassalle's thesis that before the working class all the other social groups are not more than a reactionary mass, what clearly contradicts the program lines of bourgeois democratic claims suggested in the same program. He also notes the lowering of the internationalist principle and the theoretical misunderstanding about the laws regulating the wages. The program is also silent about the organization of the working class as such "in trade unions".

Claiming the State's help to solve social problems is seen as a mistake, and the formation of a "free people's State" is seen as something empty. About the State, Engels understands it as a reality intrinsically linked to class violence and domination:

Now, since the state is merely a transitional institution of which use is made in the struggle, in the revolution, to keep down one's enemies by force, it is utter nonsense to speak of a free people's state: so long as the proletariat still makes use of the state, it makes use of it, not for the purpose of

freedom, but of keeping down its enemies and, as soon as there can be any question of freedom, the state as such ceases to exist (Engels 1875).

Engels and Marx's opinions were not considered and in the late May of 1875, the new program was unanimously approved with minor changes, and the new Social-democratic Party of Germany (SPD) was founded. Marx's and Engels's opinion were that such unity had come in much rush and without the necessary theoretical clarification, which is indispensable in itself for the mass education.

Although having tried to step back, Marx and Engels decided to persist in their educational role of the potential mass educator, being party representatives in England. Although minority, Bebel-led Eisenach group took over the direction of the party, but gave it an orientation, which let it open to several ideological trends, also open to groups and individuals from many different social origins. This was a logical consequence of the commitment to Lassallean branch, because the theoretical clarity had been disregarded since the foundation of the party. Thus, besides the original groups, at the SPD, Johann Most's semi-anarchist trend had coexisted with reformist and philanthropic groups.

In fact, the most serious and influential opponent seen by Marx and Engels was Professor Eugen Dühring, from the University of Berlin, who defended a cooperative socialism and was against the dialectical conception stemming from Hegel. This interlocutor deserved a concentrated effort of rebuttal by Engels, what was seen unwelcome by many sectors in the party. The set of articles written in 1877 became the book *Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science*, published in 1878, which represented an endeavor of synthetic and systematic explanation of Marx and Engels's conceptions, which had been in development for more than thirty years. This work was later on known as *Anti-Dühring*.

The objective of the book was, then, to go beyond only contesting Dühring's theses: it intended to provide an accessible theoretical orientation to serve as a guideline for political and cultural understanding of social democracy. In fact, it should be noted that this was the most influential work on the formation of part of SPD managing group, the one defined as *Marxist*. Engels' proposition was even to present an appropriate worldview to the labor movement in its ideological struggle against the bourgeois world.

Although Marx had approved Engels's works, particularly because of its political goals, and had also contributed with a chapter, it is quite clear here the reciprocal respect they had with each other's idiosyncrasies, because Engels' theoretical particularities clearly surfaced. Marx's good reception of Darwin's works was dramatically attenuated and Dühring used to satirize Marx as an old Hegelian, while Engels used to assimilate Darwin's science and to enclose Dialectics into general laws, under a nourished and persistent Hegel's influence.

In fact, Engels' reflections might be seen as a variant in revolutionary thinking, distinct and one with Marx. Certain scientific and naturalistic bias - perhaps derived from his passion for Natural Sciences and Darwin's works - along with the positive partitioning among Philosophy, Political Sciences and Socialism seriously jeopardize the Dialectics in cosmic laws. In fact, dialectics is reduced to a natural phenomenon, with its own laws of immanent movement and not as a method for apprehending the reality in movement.¹

As a leaflet, three chapters originally written for this book were detached and published in France, under the title, possibly assigned by Paul Lafarge, as *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, but not contested by Engels. This leaflet was translated into many languages and was largely spread, thus hugely contributing to ideological formation of the labor movement and of Marxism as well, under the conditions of Germany in the 19th century. The Utopianism could easily be contested among the formulators at the time of Industrial Revolution rescued by Engels, as well as the scientificism of German socialism, if we can understand this one as an imposition of natural movement laws of humankind's history, as Engels seemed to understand.

In the third article of the leaflet, Engels states that the materialist conception of history suggests that "the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought (...) not in the philosophy, but in the economics of each particular epoch (Engels 1880)." Following the text, he coherently disregards the role of ideology and philosophy in the reproduction of capital order and insists that contradictions in the bourgeois production mode will make socialism a historical need, coming from a natural law of development in men's social life.

The essential distinction from the current Engels's thought related to Marx is the idea of dialectics and the consequent understanding of the role of subjectivity as a material force to preserve or transform social order. Engels, in fact, when attaching the movement of social human being to the movement of nature, reduces the importance of praxis in the process of knowledge and social transformation.

However, it is fascinating to observe Engels's insight on the necessary intervention of State to attenuate the self-destructivity of capital and the first steps that would lead to the imperialist era, with the formation of trusts. Even defending socialism as a scientific fact emerging from the objective movement of the history of economy, Engels's intention is to encourage the working class's confidence and will, as a supposed (almost

transcendental) actor of a law of history. For this, it is necessary at least to outline the mode of overcoming capitalism.

Whilst the capitalist mode of production more and more completely transforms the great majority of the population into proletarians, it creates the power which, under penalty of its own destruction, is forced to accomplish this revolution. Whilst it forces on more and more of the transformation of the vast means of production, already socialized, into State property, it shows itself the way to accomplishing this revolution. The proletariat seizes political power and turns the means of production into State property. But, in doing this, it abolishes itself as proletariat, abolishes all class distinction and class antagonisms, abolishes also the State as State (Engels 1880).

And he continues after

When, at last, it becomes the real representative of the whole society, it renders itself unnecessary. As soon as there is no longer any social class to be held in subjection; as soon as class rule, and the individual struggle for existence based upon our present anarchy in production, with the collisions and excesses arising from these, are removed, nothing more remains to be repressed, and a special repressive force, a State, is no longer necessary (Engels 1880).

Engels's historical naturalism subverts the dialectics and hedge the collective will, subjectivity and ideology as materiality. It is possible here to note that the proletariat comes out as an instrument to make effective a law of historical development, not as a collective subject having a will of human emancipation, which has incorporated the philosophy of praxis, just to remember Gramsci. The observation made by Gramsci about Engels is in the context of Bukharin's criticism and through it the Marxism ongoing in the USSR. The fact is that Engels submits the dialectics by preserving and emphasizing the struggle between materialism and idealism, "traditional expressions of the old society" and not a new dialectics as an expression of a new integral philosophy (Gramsci 1932-1933).

When this Engels's text was published, the Anti-Socialist Laws were already in effect in Germany. In fact, in October 1878, Bismarck had got the approval for the Exceptional Laws Against the Socialists, which prevented the party's organization and propaganda, but allowed social democrats to run for elections. At first, the party was dazed, but then it started to rebuild in the new conditions from 1880 and resumed an important publication in Switzerland named *Der Sozialdemokrat*, with which Engels collaborated regularly since Bernstein took over the journal's direction.

In fact, in 1880, Engels had contacted Kautsky and Bernstein, starting a long-lasting collaboration, which would have plenty of theoretical and political consequences. Engels then thought about gathering in SPD a Marxist theoretical and political group around Bebel and himself, which could eventually spread to other countries. The journal *Neue Zeit*, from Stuttgart, run by Johann Dietz after 1883, helped a lot in this work.

Marx was entangled in his studies and was struggling with severe health problems in family and also himself. His concerns were focused on finishing the second volume of *Capital*. His wife's death, and soon after the death of his daughter, let him very despondent and so died in 1883.

The Legacy of Marx and the Thought of Engels

From Marx's death, Engels assigned himself another task, besides being a researcher with his own objectives and a political and ideological guide of the labor movement, a movement which was standing on a sedimented socialist cultural tradition, which was itself very eclectic, ranging from Anarchism to State socialism. Now Engels would transform himself in the heir of Marx's legacy, the organizer and promoter of an unfinished work. These interlaced elements set the historical ground in the origins of *Marxism*.

In his eulogy in front of Marx's grave, on March 17th 1883, Engels spoke decisive words to interpret his own thoughts: "Just as Darwin discovered the law of development of organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of development of human history (Engels 1883)." In fact, for Engels, Marx and Darwin's works were complimentary and Engels's ongoing intention was expressing a science philosophy to render this synthesis. His unfinished effort, finally abandoned in 1883, resulted in *Dialectics of Nature*, was centered on this objective.

After Marx's death, Engels devoted himself to prepare the third German edition of the first volume of *Capital* and to publicize Marx's most accessible writings to a larger public, and which could serve as an educational initiative. This way, Engels prepared in different moments new editions of Marx's old texts, such as *The Poverty of Philosophy*, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, *The Civil War in France*, *Critique of*

the Gotha Programme, The Class Struggles in France, sometimes assigning titles and visualizing immediate political objectives.

In his last days of life, Marx was devoted to completing the second volume of *Capital*, but without the success he expected, but he also worked on studying Russia. Engels was following the work, as well as Marx's personal problems, and preferred not to pressure him to finish the work. The manuscripts left at a very advanced level were organized by Engels, who published the second volume of Marx's great works in 1885.

In the foreword, Engels offers an example of the need for a rigorous philological study of Marx's works. He tells about the state he found the manuscripts and the publishing work they demanded since Marx used to write on

careless style full of colloquialisms, often containing coarsely humorous expressions and phrases interspersed with English and French technical terms or with whole sentences and even pages of English. Thoughts were jotted down as they developed in the brain of the author (Engels 1885).

From this point on, Engels devoted to organizing and sometimes completing the studies left by Marx that would make up the third volume. The third volume was finally published in 1894. He had even more difficulties and Engels's intervention at the body of the text was more meaningful, both for organization and final writing. What would make the fourth volume was practically ready - although considering it as a time-sensitive text - he was committed to publishing it later. ⁱⁱIt can be noted that even Marx's magnum opus forced Engels to interfere - and it is now known to what extent it - with changes in content and substance. Only a rigorous philological study can partially clarify the issues left behind, but it could be more correct to affirm that both authors would have signed this work.

As a researcher, Engels left an extensive manuscript about the history of German people, also left aside at the time of Marx's death. From these notes, we can verify some important contributions about the national question, but part of this material was also his basis to write *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, in 1884. However, Engels's testimony in the foreword of this work is very illustrative about the objectives of the text: to make a materialistic presentation of the problems raised in the title, using Lewis Morgan's work *Ancient Society*, published in the USA in 1877, about what Marx had taken several notes. Well, this seemed to be enough to legitimate the Engelsian reading of history, to which he incorporated Marx, Darwin and now also Morgan, deemed to be a new discoverer of the materialistic conception of history. The summary was simply put as:

According to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of the immediate essentials of life. This, again, is of a twofold character. On the one side, the production of the means of existence, of articles of food and clothing, dwellings, and of the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species (Engels 1884).

It is once more remarkable the almost absolute emphasis placed on the economic relations and the lack of any reference to cultural representations. In fact, this can be explained by the fact that Engels used to consider them only as fake representations of the world, as alienation, as a delay to be overcome by science, by the true science of *Marxism*, and not as collective subjectivities that organize social life. Science and ideology seem, for Engels, as antinomic terms, as true and false conscience.

This book, however, was not lacking its objective of providing a theoretical and programmatic framework for the socialist labor movement. Here Engels analyses the State issue, by systematically discussing the origins of State in Athens, in Rome and among the German people. The State

it is a product of society at a certain stage of development; it is the admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it has split into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to dispel (Engels 1884).

Engels does not relate the process of overdetermination of commercial capital to the autonomization of politics in the state, and this way he doesn't particularize the bourgeois state. For him, the state does not evolve as the expression of struggling classes and therefore it can understand that the institutions of the German Empire illustrate the essence of a State at a lower stage of development that we can be seen as linear. In fact,

The highest form of the state, the democratic republic, which in our modern social conditions becomes more and more an unavoidable necessity and is the form of state in which alone the last

decisive battle between proletariat and bourgeoisie can be fought out – the democratic republic no longer officially recognizes differences of property (Engels 1884).

The proletariat "in the measure in which it matures towards its self-emancipation, in the same measure it constitutes itself as its own party and votes for its own representatives, not those of the capitalists." We are not informed on how this maturity will occur, if by a natural historical process or by any other way. The next step of the inescapable historical process is that

approaching a stage in the development of production at which the existence of these classes has not only ceased to be a necessity, but becomes a positive hindrance to production. They will fall as inevitably as they once arose. The state inevitably falls with them (Engels 1884).

One can see once more that for Engels the historical process is moved by general laws similar to those stated by the natural sciences. In the previous quote, one can see the State as a historical engine determined by the existence of classes, but its roots are in the need for moving the economy. In the late 19th century, the thesis was that a point in the democratic republic was approaching - the highest and superior form of State - when there would be the final struggle between the classes, unsuspecting actors of a play with a right end, because the progress seems inescapable. There is no doubt that Engels was building the *Marxism* framework highly rooted on the naturalistic and evolutionist view, which prevailed in the bourgeoisie high culture of the late 19th century.

In 1886, Engels wrote an opusculum named *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, a seminal text to define the outlines of the newly-born Marxism. First of all, this text comes out as the Engelsian reading of Hegel's works, in its content and meaning. For Hegel, the dialectics constitutes itself as the movement of exposing the concept and its necessary connections, which come to make up and expose the real; it is not a method for apprehending the movement of real. Engels understands the dialectics as a component of the real and as a scientific method, so that knowledge derives from the clarification of dialectical connections present in the movement of world. Dialectics is the key that moves to the real always toward more complex and higher stages, but always as 'one', both in man's organic and social lives. After all, it could be said that, on the limit, Engels makes almost an evolutionary and positivist adaptation of dialectics.

Engels sees Hegel as the last philosopher, the last one to make a complete and articulated philosophical system, from which one can fundamentally apprehend the dialectical method. Nonetheless, this philosophical system, although useful for the debate about religion, was not for the political struggle in the 1840s Germany, what would have paved the way to rescue the Anglo-French materialism from the previous century.

The person responsible for rescuing the materialism would then have been Feuerbach. In his philosophy, mainly exposed in *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), he rescues the natural man as the starting point of Philosophy. In his struggle against the Christian religion, he proposed a moral and intellectual reform to create a new link between human beings and between mankind with nature. But this naturalistic abstract proposition didn't have implications in history and politics, what partially explains the relative marginality to which Feuerbach was overshadowed.

But Engels correctly notes that "out of the dissolution of the Hegelian school, however, another tendency arose, the only one which has borne real fruit. And this tendency is essentially connected with the name of Marx (Engels 1886)." This statement is followed by an explanatory note of utmost importance:

Here I may be permitted to make a personal explanation. Lately repeated reference has been made to my share in this theory, and so I can hardly avoid saying a few words here to settle this point. I cannot deny that both before and during my 40 years' collaboration with Marx I had a certain independent share in laying the foundation of the theory, and more particularly in its elaboration. But the greater part of its leading basic principles, especially in the realm of economics and history, and, above all, their final trenchant formulation, belong to Marx. What I contributed — at any rate with the exception of my work in a few special fields — Marx could very well have done without me. What Marx accomplished I would not have achieved. Marx stood higher, saw further, and took a wider and quicker view than all the rest of us. Marx was a genius; we others were at best talented. Without him the theory would not be by far what it is today. If therefore rightly bears his name (Engels 1886).

It is Engels' reading of the origins of Marxism: the disintegration of German classical philosophy, after having reached its apex and limit with Hegel, it made possible the emergence of a theoretical strand that should be associated to Marx's name, but that counted on one of his contributions. However, what Engels doesn't say

and couldn't even say is that *Marxism* is clearly structured thanks to himself in the twelve years he outlived Marx, a period when his reading of Marx's works and his own production could stand out. The illustration of this is in the sequence of the text where Engels outlines his view on the "materialist conception of history".

The trend started by Marx would also be a return to the "materialist standpoint", but now appropriating the "dialectical method". Engels advances the founding idea of the whole *Marxism*:

Thus dialectics reduced itself to the science of the general laws of motion, both of the external world and of human thought: — two sets of laws which are identical in substance, but differ in their expression in so far as the human mind can apply them consciously, while in nature and also up to now for the most part in human history, these laws assert themselves unconsciously, in the form of external necessity, in the midst of an endless series of seeming accidents. Thereby the dialectic of concepts itself became merely the conscious reflex of the dialectical motion of the real world and thus the dialectic of Hegel was turned over; or rather, turned off its head, on which it was standing, and placed upon its feet (Engels 1886).

Here the doubts about the coincidence or not of Marx e Engels's thoughts build up. It is difficult to state that Marx might have had any relation with the French materialist metaphysics. It is more likely that his materialism has come from the Greek thought, then from Spinoza, and much less from the liberal bourgeois Enlightenment. Likewise, it is not clear that Marx understood dialectics as a set of laws of motion intrinsic to matter or even intrinsic to human history, being enough then to the modern man to apprehend its connections and make science from them.

Marx didn't even place dialectics on its feet, because in fact he understood having put Hegel inside out, that is, he took dialectics as a method to expose the real and not the concept, or rather, he transformed the concept into the exteriorization of the movement of real by human intervention, by praxis. Engels's scientific and naturalized dialectics makes possible to contrast materialism and idealism, but Marxian dialectics dissolves and overcomes this binomial in the philosophy of praxis, as Gramsci defended in his *Prison Notebooks*. The difference is not of little account and the incidences of it in the future history of *Marxism* cannot be disregarded.

For Engels, nature and also human's social life are composed of a set of processes, but "this distinction (...) cannot alter the fact that the course of history is governed by inner general laws". Engels conceives history as clash of individual interests and wills to guarantee that "the conflicts of innumerable individual wills and individual actions in the domain of history produce a state of affairs entirely analogous to that prevailing in the realm of unconscious nature". But it is just there that "(but) where on the surface accident holds sway, there actually it is always governed by inner, hidden laws, and it is only a matter of discovering these laws (Engels 1886)".

But what is the purpose of discovering these laws? If the scientific knowledge does not find a link to the conscious practical activity - except in the field of Ethics – what is the historical reason for the political struggle for socialism? Engels believes he knows the inner laws of history and the method to identify the forces determining and moving human objectives, as well as those of the organizations, their bosses and he knows it is necessary

to ascertain the driving causes which here in the minds of acting masses and their leaders (...) (it) is the only path which can put us on the track of the laws holding sway both in history as a whole, and at particular periods and in particular lands (Engels 1886).

The contemporary world proved the existence of struggling classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, but it was clear that "the origin and development of two great classes was seen to lie clearly and palpably in purely economic causes." What happened was that "the productive forces represented by the bourgeoisie rebelled against the order of production represented by the feudal landlords and the guild-masters." In the sequence, by Engels's analysis,

this industry produces, on the one hand, an ever-increasingly proletarianization of the great mass of the people, and on the other hand, an ever greater mass of unsalable products. Overproduction and mass misery, each the cause of the other — that is the absurd contradiction which is its outcome, and which of necessity calls for the liberation of the productive forces by means of a change in the mode of production (Engels 1886).

Accordingly, classes are a representation of productive forces, class struggle takes a political form, but the content and the purpose are of economical character, "therefore, here at least, the State — the political order

— is the subordinate element, and civil society — the realm of economic relations — is the decisive element (Engels 1886).”

As a subordinate element, the State separates from society, becomes a class State and tends to mystify the economic relations. There is no doubt that Engels separates economy and politics (as opposed to what Hegel and Marx used to do) and provides ammunition for the trade unionism, which controls the SPD, but also to the parliamentary representation.

Engels published a new edition of this text in 1888, when then decided to attach a Marx's draft named *Ad Feurbach*, much likely written in May of 1845.ⁱⁱⁱ But Engels made some changes in the theses, which meanings and implications are not easy to suppress. In some cases, the change may have occurred to make the text easier to understand, but there are also passages changing the meaning of Marx's writings, as it occurs in thesis III. Here Engels re-writes the first part, without substantially changing it in meaning. In the second part, however, that clarifies the first, Engels withdraws a decisive word - not only in thesis, but also in all Marxian formulation - which is the word *self-modification* or *self-transformation*, and changes the expression “revolutionary practice” to “transforming practice”. These are not of little account and can be the result of political conjuncture, but have serious implications of theoretical character.^{iv}

If in thesis III the changes made by Engels in his friend's text might have another explanation, the change made in thesis IV leaves no room for doubt, because his adaptations moved the whole set closer to his own thoughts. Engels replaces words and takes out from Marx the idea that in Feuerbach there is the finding of existence of a duplication of men's world into a religious world, which is the representation of mundane world - which also exists due to self-alienation - being up to philosophy to resolve the first into the second. In the change, Engels suggests the religious world is imaginary and the mundane world is real, as if both were not part of a set of the social relations.

Next, Engels adds a sentence that seems to be of explanatory character, which asserts that Feuerbach cannot note that once this work is done, the main part was still to be done. Engels suggests, then, that the critique of religion must be followed by the critique of the real world and in another change, he makes explicit that first the earthly world must be understood in its contradictions to be then revolutionized in the practice. Marx signalizes this as a unique process, being a condition to the other, theory and practice linked together, while Engels perceives it as a cleavage. The final sentence is an example of Marx's rationale, which asks that the critique of the holy family requires the abolition of the earthly family, while Engels only guides first to the theoretical critique, then to the practical transformation of earthly family and after to a confirmation of an alleged cleavage. Engels's publication of the so-called theses on Feuerbach is the clearest expression of how his thought appropriates and reformulates Marx's thought and exposes his own. Engels's thought, as we can see, emphasizes the question of materialism to the point of slipping to economism and breaking with the dialectical relation subject / object.

Political battle and last works

Along the 1880's, although under the exception law, social democracy could consolidate and expanded its influence to Germany and also throughout Europe. The political group Engels aggregated around him became sounder, although not in majority, thanks in great part to the ability of theoretical formulation demonstrated by the old Marx's partner. The foundation of International Socialist, in Paris, in July 1889, at the celebration of the centenary of French Revolution, gave a new boost to the socialist labor movement and an expanded space for the resonance of Engels's and Marx's thought. In October 1890, the discriminatory law against the socialists was suspended as a result of a political crisis involving the rising of Emperor William II and the dismissal of Bismarck from chancellery.

As already mentioned, Engels's theoretical rationale tended to emphasize materialism and underestimate subjectivity as the fundamental material element of activity of the collective social being. Because of that, he faced difficulties to come up with a revolutionary political theory. In the 1890's, Engels devoted to organize a politics that articulated the development of productive forces of capital, the capitalist crisis and the conflicts derived from international politics, without abandoning the efforts to theoretical clarification, historical research and dissemination of Marx's works.

With the foundation of German empire, in Central and Eastern Europe, an alliance was formed among Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia. Engels used to think the development of productive forces in these three empires would lead to a political and military crisis of serious proportions. However, the main problem was that the oppressed nationalities, the Polish nation in the first place, but also the small Danubian and Balkanian nations. Russia seemed to be the most fragile link in this alliance, where capitalism started to develop and where a Jacobin-style bourgeois revolution was placed on the agenda. We can note that Engels, differently from Marx, never believed in the possibility of Russia finding in the peasant communal tradition the foundation to leverage

the revolutionary process. For Engels, the development of capitalism was inexorable and necessary to Russia (Del Roio 2009).

With Bismarck leaving the scene, Germany redefines its strategic position, getting more support from Austria-Hungary and moving more towards Balkans, what creates conflicts with Russia, this one, on its turn, forcing to be closer to France. For Engels, the risk of generalized war, due to actions of Russian czarism, would lead Europe to a terrible catastrophe, whose main victims would be both Germany itself and social-democracy.

A revolution in Russia would imply the independence of Poland and could provoke substantial changes in Germany, which could even be constituted as a democratic republic. But a war unleashed by Czarism would force social-democracy to be in defense of Germany, the Western civilization, against the Russian barbarism. In his writing published in the early 1890, *Foreign Policy of Russian Tsarist*, Engels makes this analysis of the presence of Russia in European geopolitics.

In 1892, when the approach of France and Russia was consolidated, Engels writes an article requested by the French socialists. His political (and theoretical) position is once more clearly expressed. For him, the German socialist and labor movement got to accumulate a force capable to take it to political power in one decade, but in a peaceful situation. A European war could mean both the anticipation of this inexorable process and the destruction of socialism in Germany with the advantage of dominant classes and Tsarism. What should then be the German socialists' position in case of a war?

In the interest of the European revolution, they are obliged to defend all the positions that have been won, not to capitulate to the enemy from without any more than to the enemy within; and they cannot accomplish that except by fighting Russia and its allies, whoever they may be, to the bitter end (Engels 1892).

Engels predicted the terrible possibility of a contraposition to emerge between the French and German labor classes. In fact, in broad terms, Engels predicted the tragedy that would involve Europe a quarter of a century later, as well as the Russian Revolution. But his analysis was based on the link among productive forces, economic and international crises (that is, State political power).

Also in 1890, perhaps due to the boost represented by the foundation of International Socialist and the advance of labor movement, Engels had an important epistolary activity, having contacted Antonio Labriola, in Italy, for example. An important letter to ascertain Engels's materialist conception was addressed to Bloch, in September of 1890. Engels writes:

According to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of the immediate essentials of life. Other than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. (...) The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure (...) — also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form. There is an interaction of all these elements in which, amid all the endless host of accidents (...), the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary (Engels 1890a).

As we can see, the human subjectivity is submitted to decisive laws of motion of economy and is almost absent from this materialist conception of history, history running as natural as a chemical reaction. Engels explains better:

We make our history ourselves, but, in the first place, under very definite assumptions and conditions. Among these the economic ones are ultimately decisive. But the political ones, etc., and indeed even the traditions which haunt human minds also play a part, although not the decisive one (Engels 1890a).

Then, he continues:

In the second place, however, history is made in such a way that the final result always arises from conflicts between many individual wills, of which each in turn has been made what it is by a host of particular conditions of life. Thus there are innumerable intersecting forces, an infinite series of parallelograms of forces which give rise to one resultant — the historical event. This may again itself be viewed as the product of a power which works as a whole unconsciously and without volition (Engels 1890a).

Culture and organized will are always absent, because history, in the aforementioned quote, follows Physics as a metaphor. In a letter to Schmidt, written no more than one month later, Engels tries to make clear his understanding of the subjective elements of social life, of the so-called super-structure. Engels makes use of an optical metaphor, the inversion of image when passing through a lens. He answers to the interlocutor that the market of money and values is in fact only a distorted view of the motion of industry, but created a proper dynamic and became autonomous. Having the division of work as a starting point, by Engels's suggestion, we reach the State. For him, then,

The economic movement gets its way, but it has also to suffer reactions from the political movement which it established and endowed with relative independence itself, from the movement of the state power on the one hand and of the opposition simultaneously engendered on the other. Just as the movement of the industrial market is, in the main and with the reservations already indicated, reflected in the money market and, of course, in inverted form, so the struggle between the classes already existing and already in conflict with one another is reflected in the struggle between government and opposition, but also in inverted form, no longer directly but indirectly, not as a class struggle but as a fight for political principles, and so distorted that it has taken us thousands of years to get behind it again (Engels 1890b).

After this note about politics, Engels assesses the Law:

The reflection of economic relations as legal principles is necessarily also a topsy turvy one: it happens without the person who is acting being conscious of it; the jurist imagines he is operating with a priori principles, whereas they are really only economic reflexes; so everything is upside down. And it seems to me obvious that this inversion, which, so long as it remains unrecognized, forms what we call ideological conception, reacts in its turn upon the economic basis and may, within certain limits, modify it (Engels 1890b).

Engels finished his assessment about the super-structures informing that: "As to the realms of ideology which soar still higher in the air, religion, philosophy, etc., these have a prehistoric stock, found already in existence (...), of what we should today call bunk (Engels 1890b.)"

It is clear that Engels's materialist view is reduced to an economic determinism mitigated by the possibility of politics to give shape to the fundamental economic movement, but again reinforced by the theory of inverted reflex, that makes politics, law, philosophy, and art mere ideology, mere false consciousness, able to act unconsciously about the economic movement. On the other hand, the task of science is to clarify the fog present before the reality and as the natural sciences run fast to this direction, the Marxism's task is to clarify the inexorable march of men's history.

It was important that the working class organized in the Party incorporated this vision indicating the science of history guaranteed its emancipation. With this Engels contributed to the organization / education of the class. Because of his view of science as a positivity that confronted ideologies, inverted views of the world, he failed to realize the importance of the materiality of ideologies and their role in preserving or changing order. You didn't see how science is also ideology. All of this limits the perspective of revolutionary praxis, because the history runs the same without a conscious subject.

In 1891, the SPD held its congress in Erfurt, when the left wing of so-called "youngsters" was expelled. Decided to defeat Lassalle's (dead in 1864) persistent influence, Engels and his group opted for publishing Marx's critical comments to the party's foundation program in 1875. This text came to light under the title *Critique of the Gotha Program*. Now in 1891, the SPD could become totally *Marxist*. Nevertheless, Marxist in the sense Engels, Kautsky and Bebel understood it. Erfurt's program was mostly written by Kautsky, who exposed the general trends of development of capitalism, how the monopolization is, the proletarianization, the increasing crises, the importance of labor party and International Socialist and, in the end, the need for the labor class one day to take on the state power.

However, as this process comes as a consequence of objective laws, it would be up to the party to be ready only when the time to take on the power comes. Meanwhile, as indicated at the end of program, the party should fight for the democratization in the grounds of bourgeoisie, of capitalism, what included broad and direct universal suffrage to women, separation between the Church and the State, social legislation, etc. Engels made some occasional critiques to this program, such as the need to clarify somehow the objective of creating a centralized democratic republic in Germany.

Erfurt's program expressed part of internal conflicts of the party's culture, but also the profile of Engels's thought, which by reducing capitalism to the movement of economy from whose contradictions an inverted

super-structure was rising, only surpassed by science, which model would be the natural sciences, projecting itself on human life as economy or the economic history. The Marxian human nature as "the set of social relations", which equals and transcends philosophy, economy and politics in the man's emancipating praxis, is lost. Thus, in the program, theory and practice dissociate from each other, as economy and politics dissociate, too.

In the following years, the ultimate years of his life, Engels kept devoting to the most candent problems of the socialist movement, from the agrarian issue that was growing in importance, to international problems, but also to his studies, such as the one resulting in *A Contribution to the History of Primitive Christianity*, published in 1894. Already in fragile health, in the early 1895, Engels decided to publish some texts Marx had written to the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* along 1850, about the development of 1848 French Revolution. Engels named the text *The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850*, and he wrote an Introduction, which can be considered as Engels' last important text and, in a way that can be seen as his political last will and testament. But it can also be seen as the synthesis of his theory.

Engels presents Marx's text as "Marx's first attempt to explain a segment of contemporary history by means of his materialist conception upon the basis of the prevailing economic condition." By Engels's interpretation, it was "bringing back, in the sense of the author, upon political events the effects of what, in the last analysis, were economic causes (Engels 1895)."

But as the causes and economic factors are difficult to ascertain immediately,

The materialist method must here too often confine itself to a tracing back of political conflicts to the conflicts of interests among the social classes and class factions of a given economic development, and to prove that the different political parties are the more or less adequate political expression of these same classes and class factions (Engels 1895).

It is impressive how clearly Engels expresses his materialist view: the economic factors determine the class structuring, that organize in political parties and it is up to the scientist to precisely determine the causal connections of several instances. The most serious point is that he also imputes this conception to Marx!

In this Engelsian reading, the lack of knowledge or little knowledge of economic movement explains the political mistakes. Even with this conception that totally submits the social action to economic determinations, "in the last instance", and in which the materiality of subjectivity is irrelevant and politics is an epiphenomenon, Engels makes a synthetic but exact retrospective evaluation of the past forty-five years. In general terms, at first, he explains how the bourgeois revolutions took place from 1640 to 1848, always as a revolution of minority groups, which intended to speak in behalf of majority ones, of popular masses, who supported them. Engels still notes that Marx and his own views were wrong about Europe being at a state of permanent revolutionary period, "in one long (revolutionary period) and with shifting fortunes, but that it could end only in the final victory of the proletariat (Engels 1895)."

The mistake was not to clarify that capitalism still had a huge potential of development and dissemination. Engels verifies that history

(...) has made clear that the status of economic development on the Continent was then by no means ripe for the abolition of capitalist production; it has proved this by the economic revolution which, since 1848, has affected the entire Continent (...) (Engels 1895).

The political defeat of labor movement is explained then (and also) by a mistaken analysis, a prediction mistake. From 1851, "the period of revolutions from below had come to a close for the time being; there followed a period of revolutions from above (Engels 1895)."

This period that goes to 1871 is fulfilled by the Bonapartism and a set of decisive wars, which contributed a lot to the process of foundation of German empire and the dissemination of Bonapartism itself as a political form. On one hand, the Franco-Prussian War ended the Bonapartism in France, established the Republic and created the Paris Commune. On the other hand, it unified Germany, established the empire and Bonapartism, and also transferred the gravity center of labor movement to German lands.

The phase now starting in Germany is marked by the gradual strengthening of labor movement and social democracy, what can be seen by the use of universal suffrage as a weapon. Engels values the suffrage as a political weapon for the labor class, the constitution of a parliamentary group and stated that then "It was found that the State institutions, wherein the rule of the bourgeoisie is organized, did furnish further opportunities by means of which the working class can oppose these same institutions (Engels 1895)."

This way of struggling seemed more effective and illustrative of how the other ways used until 1848 had been overcome. In fact, the street battle in general proved to be very ineffective most of time, requiring some very particular conditions to succeed. These conditions seemed even more difficult to reach from that phase on, considering the growth and renovation of cities, the expansion of armies and the modern arsenal.

But what would then be the revolutionary political strategy? It would be to organize and educate most of people for the revolution, preparing them for the day the economic contradiction of capitalism would reach the boiling point. So as to we know exactly the science of historical and economic development, we can say that the street battle, the insurrection “For here too the conditions of the struggle have essentially been altered. The rebellion of the old style (...) has become antiquated (Engels 1895)”.

No doubt that

The time is past for revolutions carried through by small minorities at the head of unconscious masses. When it gets to be a matter of the complete transformation of the social organization, the masses themselves must participate, must understand what is at stake and why they are to act (...). (...) But so that the masses may understand what is to be done, long and persistent work is required, (...) (Engels 1895).

This text was against the left fringes in the German labor movement and tried to disclose the suicide mistake that a certain kind of early insurrection started by a minority could be. The universal suffrage would be by now the most suitable way of struggling, because it would help organize and educate the labor class in the principles of *Marxism*. The *Marxism* defined by Engels and his political group used to state exactly that the economic development of capitalism would create by itself the insolvent contradictions which would make necessary the rising of labor class to the political power. And the social democracy was the political expression of the working class, itself as a product of economic contradictions.

But doesn't this strategy of pure common sense present an insufficiency? How is this class educated for the revolution? Taking science to them to teach them what to do in the "decisive day"? In this day, will the working class know what to do by having had access to the science of history? And will they know the need for and obligation of complying with the laws determined by the movement of economy and will they realize that their own will is also determined objectively by the same laws? The economism of Engelsian thought takes unmistakably to these questions.

Conclusion

The scission between a theory that explains and justifies a socialist future in an objective way and a social practice that remains inside the capital order cannot offer a revolutionary strategic guidance. It is then very clear that the changes made by Engels in *Theses on Feuerbach* had a substantial theoretical substrate. We need to remember that Engels withdraws two fundamental elements from these theses: self-education / self-transformation in the revolutionary praxis and subjectivity as intrinsic to a dialectical totality, which make up the social relations among men. Without praxis, Engels's materialism slips to Metaphysics.

In this scenario, *Marxism* was rooted and disseminated, as an inverted image of Marx's thoughts, as Engels himself could say. Engels's theoretical conception used to take revolution as a positive scientific prediction, but it did not mention the need to start the revolution just now, but to follow within the capital order and guarantee the best possible conditions, while awaiting the right day. There is no doubt that Engels' "will" seems to anticipate what Gramsci would call a "war of position" and that both run the risk of obtaining reformist readings, but what differentiates the two revolutionaries is the interpretation of the state and importance of politics and ideology, the importance of developing subjectivity antagonistic to capital. But Gramsci considers that

In the philosophical field it seems to me that the historical reasoning must be sought based on the fact that Marxism has had to ally itself with strange tendencies in order to fight against the elements of a pre-capitalist world among the popular masses, especially in the religious field (Gramsci 1975: Q4 § 3 422).

In prison writings, Gramsci found that after all

the origin of most of the nonsense contained in the [Bukharin's] Essay should be sought in the Anti-Dühring and in the overly external and formal attempt to create a system of concepts within

the original nucleus of the philosophy of praxis, that would satisfy the scholastic need for completeness (Gramsci 1975; Q 15 §31 1786).

It seems then unavoidable that after Engels's death this view would become even stronger among his successors in the *Marxist* political group he helped to organize. It does not matter that even this text might have had some cuts in passages about future street battles in its immediate publication, for Engels's anger.^v

In fact, in Kautsky we can see the Marxist orthodoxy taking shape in its most naturalistic and economic characters. The scientific objectivity is the rule. The reaction to this conception, taking Socialism as a product of a historical and natural process marked to any future, could only come from another part to affirm the indistinctive longevity of capitalism and making Socialism an ethical and subjective phenomenon. This way the two strands of reformism in the German labor movement - the orthodoxy and the revisionism - had as their own ideologists the two most capable theoreticians from Engels's political group: Kautsky, on one side, and Bernstein, on the other. It was not a mere coincidence that each one had stressed what Engels himself had been done: divide objectivity and subjectivity which generated the emptying of revolutionary political action. A new phase of socialist political theory, marked by the criticism of imperialism and the resumption of dialectical thinking, began with the outbreak of World War I and the possibility of international socialist revolution. Names like Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg in first time and Gramsci and Lukacs after must be recorded.

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ⁱIn fact, this philosophy of science was already present in the book *Dialectics of Nature*, written in 1875-1876 mainly (but only published in USSR, in 1925).

ⁱⁱThis volume was published by Karl Kautsky in 1905, under the title *Theories of Surplus Value*, an edition that can be considered as very problematic.

ⁱⁱⁱFor a more detailed study on this page of Marx, refer to: Labica, Georges. *As "Teses sobre Feuerbach" de Karl Marx*. 1990. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor.

^{iv}The thesis III, written by Marx, says: "The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that it is essential to educate the educator himself." This doctrine must, therefore, divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society. // The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice." Marx 1845.

^vThis Engels's text was only published in full in USSR in 1930.