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EDITORIAL

Marxism & Sciences and ‘The Actuality of Engels’

THE SEEDS OF *MARXISM & SCIENCES* (*M&S*) were planted at the first *Bilim Üzerine Marksist Tartışmalar* (Marxist Inquiries on Science), symposium held in İzmir, Turkey during the last 3 days of 2012 summer. Researchers and academics from the fields of history of science, philosophy of science, medicine, biology, physics, mathematics, political economy, sociology, international relations, history, psychiatry, musicology, and film studies presented and discussed the main theme, ‘Is Marxism Alien to Science?’ within the context of their own disciplines. The opening talk was given by Metin Çulhaoğlu, one of the foremost Marxist thinkers and politicians in Turkey.

Although it was not a large event as a Marxist symposium—twenty presentations attended by some fifty participants— it was not an ordinary one, not only in terms of the wide range of topics, but also in terms of the place given to natural sciences.

Four of the current members of the editorial collective of *M&S* also attended the first symposium in 2012: *M&S* natural sciences editor, and the mastermind behind the symposium, Alper Dizdar; *M&S* advisory board member, İzge Günal, who was a member of the organizing committee of the symposium; managing editor, Cenk Saraçoğlu, and the present author were among the presenters. The idea of publishing a journal based on the symposium was first discussed at the closing session, a decade ago.

Other editors of the *M&S* are also participated the later symposiums and schools: the assistant editor, Mesut Y. Yıldız in 2015, the humanities editor, Siyaveş Azeri in 2019, and the social sciences editor, Melda Yaman in 2020.

To put it shortly, it took a decade to decide and publish the journal before you. Literally, this first issue of the *M&S* is based on the seventh symposium organized with the main theme, ‘Actuality of Friedrich Engels at his 200th Birthday’, a year ago (see Yıldız 2022 in this issue).

One of the questions addressed at the first symposium represents the spirit of the symposium series, “Why don’t Marxists today get excited by

the most recent developments in natural sciences such as the results of CERN experiments, as did Marx and Engels when they read Darwin?" My own answer was "because of the 'Marxism without Engels'" which was also resonated with the title of my presentation, in 2012.

Marxist scholars and researchers have typically limited themselves to deal with knowledge and/or convictions produced within the domain of social sciences while remaining rather aloof to the research and scholarly discussions carried out in natural sciences. This is partly related to the commonplace perception of Engels as the culprit of the vulgar and positivist interpretations of Marxism. As Engels openly tried to combine the knowledge produced on natural sciences with his reflections on the history and development of human societies, his being discredited by certain Marxists and critical thinkers also brought about the debasement of the intellectual efforts to think natural and social world in unity and hence reflect on the knowledge produced in the domain of natural sciences.

Engels was at the heart of the problematic relation of Marxism with natural sciences. Nevertheless, 'Marxism without Engels' did not only mean a disinterest in natural sciences but also the loss of the sense of totality in Marxism. The symposium was organized in such a way as to address and problematize such a disconnection between natural and social sciences, and that is why it tried to bring together scholars especially from both social and natural sciences.

In fact, the term 'science' used in the title of the symposium is in line with this comprehensive approach. Science (*bilim*) in Turkish corresponds to *wissenschaft* in German which implies any kind of disciplinary knowledge, rather than implying natural sciences as in English.

While the subsequent symposiums continued to discuss the relation of Marxism and sciences, we also organized in due process *Marxizm ve Bilimler Okulu* (The School of Marxism and Sciences) alongside the symposium in 2017. While in the symposiums we tried to initiate scholarly discussions that aimed to frame and discuss contemporary political and social issues via a Marxist theoretical framework, in the school we rather turned our attention to revisit and discuss with the students the very fundamental concepts and premises that would constitute the building blocks for a thorough Marxist interpretation of the world today. Afterwards we published the papers presented in the first three symposiums in the form of three-volume books series.

Unsurprisingly, the unsettling political dynamics in Turkey casted its effects on our symposium and the school as well. In the aftermath of the

unsuccessful military coup attempted by an Islamic congregation in 2016, the government put restrictions on all political/academic meetings, leading us to cancel our planned symposium in 2016.

The government used the coup as a justification to suppress the whole oppositional political actors. As a result, hundreds of left-wing scholars, including Marxists have been dismissed from their positions and have not been reinstated yet. Some of them were contributors to the symposium and the school. Nevertheless, we managed to continue our activities and hold our symposiums afterwards.

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We have completed the website of the journal exactly a year ago. There we explain our aims as follows:

The fundamental aim of the journal is to contribute to rebuilding the Marxist conception of totality based on a materialist conception of history and materialist dialectics in order to encompass the entirety of intellectual domain and thus merging class struggles in nature, culture and society again, as once developed by Marx and Engels. The journal considers the materialist conception of history as being related to both history of nature and that of human society. The journal considers materialist dialectics not only as general laws of matter in motion where matter emerges mutually interrelated as thought, nature and human society, but also as laws to be investigated and developed in each branch of science, in detail, as defined by Marx and Engels.¹

We eventually invited comrades, who could be interested in the objectives of the journal, from all around the world to join the editorial collective. The qualifications and types of submissions which the journal especially promotes, were also taken in to consideration in determining the names to be invited to the editorial collective.

In this sense, *M&S* especially encourages submissions with following four qualifications:

- *Class struggles*: Studies covering class struggles in nature, culture, and/or society.
- *Geographical prevalence*: Studies from Africa, Asia, Latin America, Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe as well as Western Europe and North America.
- *Gender equality*: Studies by non-male authors and/or from Marxist and socialist feminist perspective.

1. <https://marxismandsciences.org/aims-and-scope/>

- *Marxist ecology*: Studies which considers human as part of nature, not superior to it.²

The three types of submissions are especially defined in order to correspond to contributions from natural and social sciences, and arts and humanities:

Articles: Articles are original scholarly manuscripts that contribute to any field of research.

Essays: Essays are original contributions with more personal, intuitive and introspective style and do not necessarily have to build on a comprehensive literature review and/or extensive research, unlike scholarly articles. Essays are expected to include critical reflections or political interventions into the past or actual natural/cultural/social issues and/or old or ongoing scholarly and intellectual discussions.

Cultural works: Poem, play, story, music, short film, documentary, video, photographs, graphics design, painting, sculpture etc. (ibid.)

Finally, we also expressed our wish to see members of editorial collective as regular writers of the journal. The response to our invitations were beyond our expectations. We are especially grateful to all of the members of our advisory board for accepting our invitation and for their kind and encouraging responses.

Moreover, some of the members from abroad were known by at least some of us personally. Colleagues and comrades invited from Turkey were those who we mostly met during one of the symposiums. All other members were those whom we knew through their works.

All of their responses to our invitations were no less kind and encouraging. We are also grateful to all of them. Those few comrades who could not accept our invitations due to their workloads were also supportive and encouraging. We are also grateful to them particularly to those, such as John Bellamy Foster, who promised to support the project in other possible ways.

Furthermore, it was invaluable to meet some of the comrades—those we had not met before—either online, as was the case with Joost Kircz and/or through email correspondences for discussing the project, as with Sascha Freyberg. We have also been delighted by the considerable support we received from comrades, like Farooque Chowdhury, who started to follow the journal and we hope to see them soon as contributors.

2. <https://marxismandsciences.org/guideline-for-authors/>

Meanwhile, we received some questions, particularly concerning the political position of the *M&S*. Our introductory documents provide sufficient information about our theoretical position as much as our political stance. We, as acting editors, do not aim to represent an explicit political position. Hence, the heterogeneous political positions of the editors and the members of the editorial collective.

It should be clear that the *M&S* is not politically exclusivist. It is open to publish any piece of work that complies with the theoretical principles of the journal and makes an original contribution to Marxism.

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Finally, yet importantly, the call for papers was announced on March 15, 2021 and we received a great number of submissions. We were pleased to see how submissions perfectly fit into the aims of the journal and the theme of this issue. It is no less remarkable to see how we look at matters similarly with the authors, as if we all knew each other already and have been discussing the issues for long enough time.

I should also add that we are especially grateful to Sahotra Sarkar not only for his contribution, but also for his suggestion to dedicate this issue to Richard Lewontin, one of the very few Marxist natural scientists who unfortunately passed away less than a year ago. Furthermore, we were able to contact Stuart Newman, a former colleague of Lewontin, through Sahotra Sarkar for asking his contribution to the issue as an obituary. We are grateful to Stuart Newman for accepting our invitation. Since Engels' studies on natural sciences had largely influenced Lewontin, it is a great honor for us to dedicate this issue to him.

The first contribution is an introduction by the present author. He tries to provide both an historical and theoretical framework for the main theme of this first issue, 'The Actuality of Engels'. The essay first discusses the history of 'Marxism without Engels', accompanied by a defense of Engels and then discusses the position of Marxism found itself trapped in a kind of *Mexican Standoff* as a result of its efforts to survive without Engels. The essay continues by presenting the developments, which reintroduces Engels to Marxism and concludes with presenting the recent developments for Marxism and corresponding tasks for Marxists as defined by the *M&S*.

The next contribution titled, 'Remembering Richard Lewontin (1929–2021)' has been written in memory of Lewontin by Stuart Newman. We learn from his memories that they first met when Newman was 15 and Lewontin was 31. Newman presents his firsthand account of Lewontin's

studies in biology and his struggles in *Science for the People*, in which they both took part side by side.

The next essay titled 'Lewontin's Legacy and the Influence of Engels: A View from the Trenches' is written by Sahotra Sarkar. Sarkar's essay is certainly more than a reminiscence of Lewontin and his studies and personal memories of Sarkar with him. The contribution of Sarkar gets into the details of Lewontin's intellectual legacy, his contributions to science and politics, and his relation to Engels and Marxism.

The rest of the articles and essays consider Engels in terms of the importance of his stance for reworking the concept of totality in Marxism and in addressing the *epistemological crisis* caused by his exclusion. In this sense, Roney Piedra Arencibia's article titled 'Engels' Fourfold Revenge: On the Implications of Neglecting Engelsian Dialectics in Science, Philosophy, Ecology, and Revolutionary Practice' is a great contribution in its attempt to bridge the gap between science, philosophy, nature, and history. While Arencibia defends Engels against Western Marxism, it also demonstrates how science, philosophy, nature, and history took their revenge in the face of negligence of Engels' contributions in these fields.

Joost Kircz is one of the few Marxist physicists who has been involved in these debates since early 1990s. Kircz's essay titled, 'Friedrich Engels' Importance for Contemporary Materialist Epistemology,' focuses on the contributions of Engels in terms of epistemology. Kircz not only tries to clarify Engels' contributions, but also tries to project them onto the present-day developments. His contribution stands out especially in considering such crucial questions as "to what extent scientific theories represent the known world and to what extent theories in the natural sciences and biology can serve as a model for the humanities and sociology?"

Siyaveş Azeri's article titled 'Engels' Dialectics of—Human Activity in—Nature' presents a theoretical foundation for many problems discussed in this introduction and in this issue. Azeri updates the contributions of Engels, based on a re-evaluation of Vygotsky and Ilyenkov in a revolutionary way: "laws of dialectics are the most general laws of human activity in social nature." Azeri presented a shorter version of his paper at the symposium, 'The Actuality of Engels'.

'Origin of Engels' *The Origin: A Reappraisal in the Light of The Ethnological Notebooks of Marx*' by Melda Yaman is a unique contribution focusing on anthropological contributions of Engels. Yaman's article shows how nature, society and history are interwoven even for the patriarchal family by discussing the divergences between Engels' work and that of Marx on the

matter. Her article also stands out in this issue by *a certain critical look to Engels* from a *Marxists and socialist feminist perspective*. Yaman also presented a shorter version of her paper before at the symposium, ‘The Actuality of Engels’.

Cihan Cinemre’s article titled, ‘Unity, Motion, and Reciprocity in Friedrich Engels’ *Dialectics of Nature*’ challenges the dualities such as human and nature, organic and inorganic by not only reminding the contributions of Engels famous ‘book’, *Dialectics of Nature*, but also by contributing to the materialist dialectics as the objective law of motion on earth. Cinemre’s challenge also covers the discussion of the crucial topic for dialectics, the transformation of different types of motion into one another.

Hari Kumar’s contribution titled, ‘Engels, Reductionism and Epigenetics: The Lysenko Debate’ no doubt is one of the most ambitious studies in this first issue. Its ambitiousness not only stems from the volume of the article but also from its delving into challenging domains where a great expertise is required—the Epigenetics and the role of Stalin in the Lysenko debate. However, the real challenge of Kumar lies in rejecting commonsensical assumptions in both domains.

Although ‘On the Differences between the Classical and the “Western” Marxist Conceptions of Science’ by Zeyad el Nabolsy does not seem to focus particularly on Engels in terms of its title, the reader will quickly see that the author challenges the most serious critique of Engels, namely Western Marxism. More specifically, Nabolsy’s essay challenges the roots of Western Marxism’s conception of science which was developed by the Frankfurt School. Nabolsy shows that “Marcuse and Horkheimer, even though they presented themselves as revolting against the alleged ‘economism’ of Classical Marxism, ended up endorsing a view of science which is functionally equivalent to a reductive economic conception of science.”

The next three contributions are cultural, specifically musical works. Furthermore, two of them are accompanied by video recordings of the musical performances, the other by audio recording. As has been announced, the *M&S* invites and encourages cultural workers to contribute to our journal in any format such as poetry, play, short story, musical work, short film, documentary, video, photography, graphics design, painting, and sculpture. We also ask a written text to accompany such products. We expect the products to be specifically related to the theme of the issue to be published.

Consequently, the composers Ömer Er and Mert Morali, and bass player İlker İsaletli contributed to this issue by their musical works and accompanying texts on their creation process. Ömer Er’s work titled ‘Variations on Themes Composed by Engels’ was already commissioned by the aforementioned online symposium and performed by the composer at its opening. Ömer Er composed this work based on musical exercises of Engels written during his youth.

‘*Die Produktion des Bewusstseins* for Soprano and Trumpet’ by Mert Morali, a Berlin-based composer, has already received the First Prize in Duo Category in the competition organized within the frame of *Wilde Lieder Marx Music* (2018) project by Birmingham Contemporary Music Group and *Verein zur Förderung des Jubiläumsprogramms Trier*, as a part of event series for the 200th anniversary of Karl Marx’s birth. The text of the work is a quote from *German Ideology* by Marx and Engels. The accompanying video presents the performances by Camila Mandillo (soprano) and Xukun Tong (trumpet) recorded at *Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler*, Berlin in February 9, 2020.

An İstanbul based bass player in popular, jazz and latin music, İlker İsaletli presents his work titled ‘Electric Bass Improvisations on Engels’ inspired from one of Engels’ musical exercises. Ömer Er also contributed to the work by his performance of musical ambient sounds.

There are three reviews in this issue. Tiago Camarinha Lopes reviews *How the World Works* (2019) by Paul Cockshott, Gedik reviews *Trajectories and Themes in World Popular Music* (2018) by Simone Krüger Bridge, and Yıldız reviews the symposium, ‘The Actuality of Engels’ which this issue is based on.

We are grateful to all authors and anonymous reviewers for their contributions and collaboration throughout the publication of this issue. On behalf of the editors, I would like to share our unmatched excitement with the outcome. Yet, the real assessment of our project comes from the editorial collective, the authors, the reviewers and the readers. It should be added that any comments and criticisms, positive or negative, from all those comrades would be seriously taken in to account, be it from either a worker, a university student, or a professor.

ACG.