

## Bertell Ollman

### Some Questions for Critics of Engels' Edition of Capital\*

No one contests that there were important differences between Marx and Engels. Similarly, no one contests that they agreed on many important issues. So we must be careful not to appear to argue against a position that literally no one takes. The dispute over their intellectual partnership concerns where exactly Engels differed from Marx, and how much he differed. This applies both to Engels' own writings and to his efforts as editor of Marx's works, especially *Capital*. In the century since Engels died, prevailing opinion in this matter has shifted from holding that a virtual identity of views existed between the two men to holding that their views differ substantially on almost all major questions. While never wholly in the first camp, I confess to being more uncomfortable with the current orthodoxy. Largely, this is because those who would drive a giant size wedge between Marx and Engels have neglected to give satisfactory answers (and, in most cases, even to ask) a number of crucial questions.

The most important of these questions are -

1. How could two men who differ as much as Marx und Engels are said to have differed write so many works together, most notably the *German Ideology*, the *Holy Family*, and the *Communist Manifesto*?
2. If the differences between the two men were so great, how could Marx have allowed Engels to write a number of articles - as he did - under Marx's own name?
3. If the differences between them were so great, why is it that neither Marx nor Engels ever commented on them either in their writings or in their discussions (as far as these were reported on) with other comrades?
4. If the differences between them were so great, why didn't Marx offer any dissent to Engels' *Anti-Dühring*, the work that this school takes as offering the best summary of Engels' distinctive doctrines? Marx, who was always very concerned about possible distortions of his ideas, knew that what Engels wrote in his rejoinder to Dühring would be taken by the public as an expression of their common views. Marx also had ample opportunity to register his disagreements, if they existed, since he not only read the manuscript of *Anti-Dühring* before it was published but had the manuscript read to him by Engels. Furthermore, Marx himself wrote the first draft of the chapters on economics for the book. All this occurred six years before Marx's death, when he was in relatively good health.
5. Finally - and for this is the most important question of all - how could such major differences (if they existed) not find their way into the four thick volumes of the *Marx/Engels Correspondence*? Many small differences of opinion between the two men can be found in their detailed and far ranging correspondence covering almost forty years, but nothing of the order suggested by those who would treat Engels as simply another interpreter of Marx's ideas. Yet, if major differences did exist, surely they would appear here, at least to some degree, in one form or another. They don't.

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To these questions, I could, of course, add still another - which is why such obvious (to me) and obviously important considerations have received so little attention in the rush to establish an Engelsism that is virtually distinct from Marxism, but I suspect that would take us in the direction of ideological struggle and Cold War and away from scientific investigation that has been my only concern here.

It should clear that my list of questions is not meant to resolve the dispute over the place of Engels in Marxism but only to highlight the fragile foundations on which the current orthodoxy rests. Until these questions are given satisfactory answers, the complex web of similarities and differences between Marx and Engels as well as Engels' editorial work on Capital can never be adequately described, explained or judged.

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