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**On the MEGA and the French Edition of *Capital*, vol. I:
An Appreciation and a Critique**

The new MEGA edition of the 1890 fourth German edition of volume one of Marx's *Capital*, which appeared in 1991 (MEGA² II/10),¹ is a real publishing event in Marxist studies. When taken together with the other versions of the first volume of *Capital* which have been issued as part of the new MEGA, this tenth volume in their series on Marx's economic writings now makes available to scholars all of the versions of volume one of *Capital* which were published under Marx's or Engels' editorship: the 1867 first German edition (MEGA² II/5), the 1872 second German edition (MEGA² II/6), the 1872-5 French edition (MEGA² II/7), the Engels-edited 1883 third German edition (MEGA² II/8), the Engels-edited 1887 English edition (MEGA² II/9), and finally, the Engels-edited 1890 fourth German edition (MEGA² II/10). In addition, an appendix to the last of these volumes reveals that there are important alternate texts to volume one from the 1872-75 French edition which Engels did not include in his "final" 1890 edition.

Scholars such as Roman Rosdolsky have discussed the development of Marx's economic theory from the unpublished *Grundrisse* (1857-58) to the finished volume one of *Capital*. It is equally well known that after Marx's death in 1883 Engels put together volumes two and three of *Capital* from Marx's manuscripts, leading some such as Rosa Luxemburg to question Engels' editing procedures. The fact that volume one itself went through many changes by Marx from its first edition in 1867 to the French edition of 1872-75 is far less known, nor is the fact that Engels made some important editorial decisions here. But that is what the new MEGA allows us to see, more comprehensively than ever before. To give one example of the importance of these changes and developments from 1867 to 1875, in the 1867 edition, there was no separate section on commodity fetishism at all. Some of the material later included in that section was published as part of the discussion at the beginning of the book on the commodity, while another

¹ Karl Marx, *Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie. Erster Band.* Hamburg 1890. (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1991). Referred to hereafter directly in the text as MEGA² II/10.

part of it was included in an appendix. By the 1872 German edition, there was a separate section on fetishism, which included a fair amount of material not found anywhere in the 1867 edition. Then, in the 1872-75 French edition, where, although it was a translation, Marx reworked the whole text considerably, he added a few more sentences and rearranged the material slightly. The new MEGA editions of volume one of *Capital*, with their copious appendixes indicating which passages Marx changed from one edition to another, shed new light on the process by which Marx developed his greatest theoretical work.

In establishing the 1890 fourth German edition - the 1883 third German edition was a reprint with few changes of the 1872 German edition - Engels claimed to have looked at all three editions developed by Marx and to have incorporated everything of importance from the French edition. He wrote in the preface to the 1890 fourth German edition of his effort to achieve the "most attainable final version of the text" (MEGA² II/10, p. 22). Since the publication of this 1890 edition, most scholars, Marxist and non-Marxist alike, have regarded it as the definitive text of volume one. This was for example the position taken by Louis Althusser in his introduction to a 1969 reprint of the 1872-75 French edition, where he stated that readers should also consult the German "original" established by Engels.² A new English translation of volume one was issued in 1976 with a preface by Ernest Mandel, with the claim that, in following Engels' 1890 edition, for the first time it gave the English-speaking world a complete and accurate edition.³ In France, where the prestigious publisher Gallimard's La Pléiade series of great books continues to reprint Maximilien Rubel's edition of Marx's 1872-75 French edition of *Capital* as the definitive text,⁴ the Communist Party publishing house retranslated Engels' 1890 edition into French for the Marx

² Althusser's preface to Marx, *Le Capital*, volume one (Paris: Flammarion, 1969). Althusser was so anti-Hegelian that he urged the reader to skip chapter one, with its discussion of fetishism. See also the letters from 1870-73 in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 44 (New York: International Publishers, 1975f), which often show Marx's preference for the French edition, and Engels' for the German.

³ Marx, *Capital*. Vol. I. Translated by Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin and New York: Vintage, 1976).

⁴ See Marx, *Œuvres. Économie I*, Édition établie, présentée et annotée par Maximilien R. Rubel (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), [Bibliothèque de la Pléiade]. The above-cited 1969 Flammarion edition, prefaced by Althusser, is also still in print in France.