Summary: The international conference on forthcoming volumes of (and research based on) the Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe (Complete Writings or MEGA) that took place in Tokyo in February 2015 covered a wide range of issues, from crisis theory and colonialism to ecology. A 2014 conference in Amsterdam on "Capital- an Unfinished and Unfinishable Project" is also discussed. Originally published in Frontier (Kolkata, India) on March 15, 2015 - Editors

Marxologists and Return of Marx

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Sale of 70,545 copies of 64-page Communist Manifesto by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels by the Penguin in a week compelled the latter to reprint another 100,000 copies. First published in German on 26 February 1948 in London, it became 165 years after the English edition was published by Helen Macfarlane the top seller of Little Black Classics of Penguin.

Six years ago, Jorn Schuttrumpf, chief of the Berlin publishing house Dietz, publisher of works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, stated ecstatically “Marx is fashionable again, sales had trebled—albeit from a pretty low level—since 2005” to the summer of late-2008. Three years thereafter in August-end, 2011 Bloomberg Business Week wrote -“Policy makers struggling to understand the barrage of financial panics, pro-tests and other ills afflicting the world would do well to study the works of a long-dead economist: Karl Marx. The sooner they recognize we’re facing an once-in-a-lifetime crisis of capitalism, the better equipped they will be to manage a way out of it”. For apologists of neo-liberal finance capital the queues for buying Marx’s magnum opus Das Kapital were a frightening nightmare, especially after the collapse of the USSR. But official Marxists – the Leninists – should not rejoice either as titles like Lenin’s Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism and Materialism and Empirio-criticism has been gathering dust.
In this backdrop a three-day conference on Marxology took place in Tokyo between 27 February and 1 March, under the aegis of the Graduate School for Economics and Management, Tohoku University, Japan Society for Promotion of Science and Daito Bunka University, while the financial support came from the Keiwaka Foundation, and Die Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Marx-Engels-Forschers of Japan.

Central organs of official communist parties (OCP) – let alone the mainstream media – evince no interest in the deliberations at the conference. Top brass of OCPs like the CPI(M), CPI, variants of CPI(M-L) were perhaps not abreast of the conference. It was natural as these parties carry forward Leninist vanguard concept, although this has been a brazen vulgarization of Marx who never suggested that the socialist (or communist) revolution be led by any communist party. For them, Marxology and Marxologiste are alien to ‘Marxism’. Stalin and his followers branded as enemies of Marxism considered Marxology as a deviation from Marx. But until 1930, Marxology was held in high esteem by both the CP of Soviet Union and the Communist International. David Borisovich Riazanov (real name David Borisovich Goldendakh) the greatest Marx scholar of the 20th Century whom Lenin chose as the head of Marx-Engels Institute in 1921, was hailed in Izvestia on 10 March, 1930 as “the most eminent Marxologist of our time” (10th March, 1930) and the as the Communist International rated him as “the most renowned and the most important of the Marxist scholars of our time” (Inprecorr, no.26, 19 March 1930). The institution headed by Riazanov, wrote Pravda, reached a great high "under Riazonov's direct scientific and administrative leadership, accomplished impressive work ...with his considerable scientific and investigative activity in the sphere of marxology"

Marxologists insulate themselves from the media and sensationalism and therefore, the three-day international conference on Marxology and allied topics, in Tokyo between 27 February -1 March found no space in the media. Topics covered in the conference varied from the on-going project, Complete Works of Marx and Engels, including various manuscripts in original (Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe [MEGA] to Marx's Notebooks on Agricultural Chemistry of 1868. Mentionable among themes were MEGA and Crisis Theory, new trends in Marx's Critique of Political Economy during the 1870s, concept
and significance of Marx's Credit Theory, Structural crises and long swings in economic development, Marxian Crisis Theory in the Light of the History of Economic Thought: Real and Monetary Factors, observations on Marx’s, theoretical modeling and historical -statistical analysis, the Marxian Optimum Growth Model, labor and ecology in Marx, Marx's Notebooks on Agricultural Chemistry of 1868: Beyond Liebig's theory of Stoffwechsel, latest research on Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 (or Paris Manuscripts), reexamination of ‘the Asiatic form' in ‘Forms that precede Capitalist Production’, in view of discovery of London excerpt notebooks and the Late Marx on Non-Western and Pre-capitalist Societies and the like. Among participants were Kevin Anderson, California-based Marxologist, Regina Roth, one of the editors of MEGA, Michael Heinrich, professor of Economics at Hochschule fuer Technik und Oekonomie, Berlin, author of Marx’s theory of value, The Science of Value, Thomas Kuczynski (son of famed Marxist economist Jürgen Kuczynski and, the last director at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the now-defunct German Democratic Republic, Ryuji Sasaki of Rikkyo University, Japan, well-known for his pioneering study on labour and Ecology in Marx.

I am once again grateful to Pradip Baksi, arguably the most well-read Marx-scholar and a rare-breed analyst in at least this part of India, for drawing my attention to the great event. Anderson’s paper ‘The Late Marx on Non-Western and Pre-capitalist Societies’ is accessible ( I gave the link in the facebook) It was Pradip who informed me ahead of another conference, Capital- an Unfinished and Unfinishable Project in Amsterdam, in early October 2014. It was organized by the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam (IISH) under the University of Amsterdam and the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (BBAW). The MEGA is overseen by the IISH and to date 57 out of 114 volumes, planned, have been published.

Anderson referred to the Barbarian nature of British Colonialism and strongly defended the “Chinese and Indian resistance to Britain during the years1856–9. Anderson quotes from an article in Tribune an 1857. Marx, he noted, “reversed the thrust of his earlier description in the Communist Manifesto, of the Chinese as barbarians and the British as civilized during the 1842 Opium War”. This is a refutation of the main thrust of Subaltern school of historians. ‘The English
soldiery then committed abominations for the mere fun of it; their passions being neither sanctified by religious fanaticism nor exacerbated by hatred against an overbearing and conquering race, nor provoked by the stern resistance of a heroic enemy. The violations of women, the spittings of children, the roastings of whole villages, were then mere wanton sports, not recorded by Mandarins, but by British officers themselves,” -Marx observed firmly.

The choice of theme of Tokyo conference was significant in the backdrop of the gravest crisis since the Great Depression, triggered by the US financial crisis in 2007. The world economy shows as yet shows no sign of recovery. Economic failures are multi-frontal: increasing seriousness debt crisis, unemployment, poverty and energy problem. “Karl Marx experienced economic crises of the 19th century in real time, and especially as for the 1857 crisis that was the first world economic crisis in human history and the following 1864-66 crisis, he eagerly collected detailed data from actual journalism and documented the courses of the crises in several note books”, organizers stated in their preamble. Japan is now the centre of research, perhaps next only to the International Institute of Social History (IISH). Note books, editorial work concerning publications of MEGA volumes, preserved in Tokyo, are now “seen as a first-class primary material for the historical research on the crises. The IISH, at the University of Amsterdam, preserves the archive of all the original manuscripts including notes and correspondences between Marx-Engels and contemporaries are preserved at the IISH, which to date, 57 out of 114 volumes under the MEGA project.

Going a bit adrift, let me pen a few words of the Amsterdam conference. The keynote address was delivered by David Harvey, author of The Enigma of Capital and Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism but it was too not reported in any major international newspaper, leave alone. Not only Peoples’ Democracy, New Age and Liberation, central organs of CPI(M), CPI and CPI (M-L) Liberation, even Economic and Political Weekly, did not publish even a small news on the Amsterdam conference.

Marx wanted his contributions to be continuously enriched through scientific research and his incompleteness be rid of gradually. That was why Das Kapital is ‘unfinished and unfinishable’. Unfortunately, Marxists, Marxist academics and the like, distinctively different from Marxologists, have ignored Marx’s appeal
to treat his works with a scientific temper. They do not keep in mind Marx’s Cartesian motto, De omnibus dubitandum (doubt everything).

Moreover, the choice of the theme at the Marx’s Capital, An Unfinished and Unfinishable Project Amsterdam conference was significant. The world came to learn (I did several decades thereafter) one hundred years after the Vol I of Das Kapital saw the light of the day that there were as many as four drafts of Das Kapital from Roman Rosdolsky (author of Entstehungsgeschichte des Marxschen 'Kapital' or The Making of Marx’s Capital). Another seminal study was published a few decades after by Enrique Dussel, an Argentine-Mexican scholar of philosophy. The Unknown Marx by Martin Nicolaus, published in 1968 in the New Left Review is another seminal contribution to the unveiling of Marx and his universe. He had significantly observed that Rosa Luxemburg’s Accumulation of Capital (1912) was an attempt to fill in the “most important gap in Marx’s unfinished writings, thereby throwing gasoline on a fiery intra-party dispute which still flickers today”

Paresh Chattopadhyay’s paper At the source of The Critique of Political Economy, published in the journal, Historical Materialism, was basically a review of collection of Marx and Engels' notebooks, second version of MEGA II. It has four 'sections': (1) works, articles, drafts of Marx and Engels, (2) Capital and the works preceding and preparatory to Capital, (3) correspondence, (4) notebooks, excerpt of copy books, marginal comments made by Marx and Engels. He made a logical criticism of presenting Marx as an ideologue or Marx’s (Engels’ too) writings as ideology. Marx needed to be hyphenated from this vulgarization. Chattopadhyay wrote in conclusion harped on the necessity to appreciate the ‘deideologizing’ of MEGA. Marx did not set out to create a new ideology as opposed to bourgeois ideology, what he (and Engels) did was to found ‘new materialism' and his aim, based on ‘materialist and, therefore, scientific method’ was precisely to demystify all ideologies by revealing how the ‘conditions of real life’ give rise to these ‘intellectual representations’. His theoretical work is in the realm of science, not ideology. He wrote to his friend, Ludwig Kugelmann, on 28 December 1862 that Marx’s aim was to ‘revolutionize science’ and to lay down ‘scientific" foundation"’. “In Capital,” wrote Chattopadhyay, “Marx opposes ‘disinterested investigation and unbiased scientific research to ‘malevolent conscience’. What Marx was doing
was the exact opposite of creating ‘false consciousness’ or the inverted representation of the human relations, which is what ideology is all about. ‘In all ideology’, Marx declared, ‘the human beings and their relations appear to stand on their head, as in a camera obscura’.

Regina Roth who participated at both conferences stated, “Marx left numerous excerpts and books he had read on a variety of subjects. It is still unclear whether Marx did all his studies in view of a revision of Capital, or if Capital was more a starting point from which he began further research, though he might have lost sight of his original aims. I would like to focus on Marx's work on Book 3 of Capital. In Book 1, Marx had worked out that all surplus value was produced by labour, and only by labour. Now, in Book 3, he wanted to present the different forms in which this surplus value was distributed; profit of enterprise, commercial profit, interest and rent. What questions did Marx leave open in his almost 600-pages manuscript from 1864/5, and what may be found in his papers from the later years”. MEGA editorial team found some 135,000 printed and handwritten pages left by Marx and Engels. They document their activities as authors, politicians and scientists over a range of about 50 to 60 years, from 1835 to 1883 and 1895, respectively. The first editions from this vast legacy appeared in the late 1920s and during the 1930s, proved to be very fruitful for research on both Marx and Engels. Among the texts published for the first time were the Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts from 1844, the Grundrisse of Political Economy from 1857/58; and the so-called Anti-Duhring from 1878-79. From the mid-1970s onwards, the so-called 'Second MEGA' (MEGA®) continued with the publication of previously unknown material, especially in relation to Marx's work, Capital. Marx himself had published only the first volume of Capital by 1867.

Both the Amsterdam and Tokyo conferences took place in the backdrop of traumatic state the global capitalist system which has been threatened by an entirely new type of crisis when “nearly every asset class is expensive by historical standards”. Those exercises are generally written cavalierly expressing the half-taught pundit’s blissful ignorance of new and path-breaking research findings by Marx scholars outside the regime of OCPs.

In an introductory to the Amsterdam conference last year, IISH and BBAW stated , “As a representative stream of economics that has focused on the
economic crisis, Marxian scholars have continued their theoretical and empirical research endeavours on the topic since more than a century. Their large stock of knowledge and insight must be reviewed towards a new theoretical framework to explain and solve the contemporary problems”. Marx scholars, free from partyocracy and Leninist vanguardism evince key interests in the philological and theoretical outcomes from MEGA edition of Marx’ original note books and provides overviews and new perspectives from Marxian crisis discourses. Marx never suggested that communist parties lead the revolution in lieu of proletariat.

Dhurjati Prasad Mukherjee, the legendary scholar and the father of sociological research in India used to introduce himself as a Marxologist. Marx categorically denied to be called a Marxist in 1880 somewhat out of disgust when two top socialist leaders of France, Paul Lafargue and Jules Guesde was branded as Marxists at a meeting of the First International. Marx said in French “ce qu'il y a de certain c'est que moi, je ne suis pas Marxiste” (I know for certain that I am not a Marxist). MEGA editors too do not like to be addressed as Marxists. Marx critiqued philosophers and philosophies and never made any original contribution in philosophy.

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