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BOOK REVIEWS

STEDMAN JONES, GARETH. Karl Marx. Greatness and Illusion. Allen Lane, London [etc.] 2016. xvii, 750 pp. Ill. Maps. £25.95; $35.00; €31.50.

The global economic crisis and the subsequent social and political turmoil have led to a revival of interest in Marx's life and ideas. It is thus not surprising that, amid a rich literature on Marx's critique of capitalism, new attempts have emerged at reconstructing his life. Unlike Francis Wheen's and Jonathan Sperber's recent biographies,[1] Gareth Stedman Jones's is mainly a work of intellectual history distinguished for its use, albeit partial, of the new historical critical edition of Marx's and Engels's writings (*Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe*, MEGA-2[2]). The renowned British historian aims to offer an alternative picture to twentieth-century iconography, which "bore only an incidental resemblance to the Marx who lived in the nineteenth" (p. 595). Given Stedman Jones's expertise in working-class movements in nineteenth-century Britain – where Marx spent the larger part of his life – this goal should make the book even more interesting. And, indeed, readers are not disappointed; for example, in Stedman Jones's reconstructions of the social background of the First International or the development of social democracy in Germany. Against Marx's monumental and pupil-less face scrutinizing us from the cover page, Stedman Jones seeks to offer a more mundane and contradictory picture of Marx, or, as he insists on calling him, "Karl". One could argue that the twentieth century is marked by many other such attempts, starting with David Riazanov's. But Stedman Jones's biography is also driven by another, albeit implicit, goal: coming to terms with Marx in the light of his own intellectual development from Marxism to post-structuralism. The outcome of this double game of mirrors is not always convincing.

In the first part of the book, for example, Stedman Jones criticizes Marx's concept of social classes in the light of the idea, which he advanced in his 1983 *Languages of Class*, that class is not "an expression of a simple social-economic reality", but "a form of language discursively produced to create identity" (p. 306). Marx's approach to class would merge young Hegelian understandings of the role of labour in the transformation of the world and the language of class "originating in republican, socialist and even Legitimist opposition to the 'bourgeois' monarchy of Louis Philippe in France" (p. 306). The influence of French and British political economy on Marx's analysis of the class struggle is thus largely overlooked. Strikingly, Stedman Jones ignores Marx's reflections in the Kreuznach Notebooks on the influence of property relations during the French Revolution, and the importance of Marx's and Engels's trip to Manchester in 1845. In Manchester, Marx met Chartist and trade union leaders, and read in the original the works of British political economists, including socialists like Thomas Rowe Edmonds, William Thompson, and John Francis Bray, who used Ricardo's value theory to trace the roots of profit in the only apparently free transaction between capital and labour (see MEGA-2, section IV, bks. 4 and 5). These sources contradict

1. Francis Wheen, *Karl Marx: A Life* (London, 1999), and Jonathan Sperber, *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life* (New York, 2013).
2. For information on the *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA-2) and the listings of volumes in these series (Bibliography) see: https://socialhistory.org/en/projects/marx-engels-gesamtausgabe; last accessed 11 May 2017.

Stedman Jones's argument that the Chartists criticized exploitation only as a consequence of political exclusion (p. 311), and that, like other members of the propertied classes, Marx "failed to listen to the discourse of workers themselves" (pp. 311–312). It is simply untrue that in 1850 "Karl arrived in England with little knowledge of the English class system beyond what he had read in Guizot and Engels" (p. 350).

Stedman Jones's reconstruction of Marx's intellectual development in London is also partial and often unsatisfactory. He largely ignores the content of Marx's London Notebooks (1850–1853) and the elaboration of his critique of political economy in the early 1850s. Although he admits that Marx and Engels wrote 487 articles for the *New York Tribune* – far more than for the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* – Stedman Jones devotes much less attention to Marx's scientific journalism in London. He thus underestimates the changes in Marx's position at the time. Stedman Jones argues, for example, that Marx's articles on India repeat the same vision of international revolution advanced in the *Manifesto* (pp. 358, 359). Now, whatever one's position on Marx's view in the 1850s of the double mission of British colonialism in India, there is a big difference between the *Manifesto*'s vision of international revolution – just focused on Europe and ignoring the agency of non-European peoples – and Marx's 1853 analysis of the conditions for the independent social upheaval of the Indian people (*Marx-Engels Collected Works*, MECW, vol. 12, p. 217). While quoting Kevin Anderson's *Marx at the Margins*,[3] moreover, Stedman Jones maintains – without any discussion – that Marx's "thinking was not deeply affected by the Indian mutiny" (p. 359), and that his attitude to the "Taiping Rebellion" would be "even more distant and poorly informed", fitting "perfectly his belief in the unchanging structures of Oriental Empires". In order to ground the latter critique, Stedman Jones astonishingly quotes only one article written in 1862, when the movement was decaying (p. 359), without even mentioning Marx's enthusiastic support for the revolt in the early 1850s. "The next uprising of the people of Europe – Marx then argued – […] may depend more probably on what is now passing in the Celestial Empire […] than on any other political cause that now exists" (*Ibid*., p. 93). This and other textual evidence, including Marx's studies of world history and non-capitalist societies in the London Notebooks, contradict the view that before 1868 Marx saw communal forms of landed property as "inseparable from despotic rule" (p. 580), focusing only on private property (p. 584) and the revolutionary role of the industrial working class in the West (pp. 582, 585).

Another blatant omission concerns Stedman Jones's argument that, in 1850–1851, Marx "showed no interest in Ricardo's qualifications" to the labour theory of value, and that in the *Grundrisse* (1857-1858) and later works he did not treat the relationship between value and price as a "significant challenge to his approach" (pp. 399, 412). In the *1861–1863 Manuscript* Marx provides *two* main reasons why the Ricardian School dissolved: not only Ricardo's inability to solve the question of surplus value (p. 412), but also his failure to integrate the formation of the average rate of profit and hence the transformation of value into price of production (MECW, vol. 32, p. 361). This is a crucial question that Marx addresses at length in the *1861–1863 Manuscript*. Even more surprisingly, Stedman Jones argues that Marx decided "not to include discussion of circulation and expanded reproduction in the published volume" of *Capital* (pp. 422–423), thus determining a fatal "reduction in scope of his theory" and leaving unanswered fundamental questions on the global reach of capitalism and its relationship to crisis (p. 426). Stedman Jones completely ignores Marx's analysis of simple and

3. Kevin Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago, IL, 2010).

extended reproduction in Part 7. This is a fundamental mistake because, as I argued in my 2015 monograph,[4] it is precisely in those chapters that Marx develops his analysis of capital expansionism and global reach. Stedman Jones's acknowledgement that Part 8 on the so-called primitive accumulation shows that "capitalist development had been decisively assisted by political intervention" and thus its worldwide expansion "could be resisted or avoided" (p. 430) contradicts his criticism of Marx for supposedly depicting capital as an "impersonal and inevitable process, detached from the actions of human agents" (p. 425).

These shortcomings explain the hiatus characterizing Stedman Jones's interpretation of Marx's theoretical and political positions in the 1860s and 1870s. In his view, Marx was most effective when he abandoned assumptions about the centrality of the party and the concern to push the International Working Men's Association towards a socialist agenda (p. 472), "and put his faith in trade unions as the means of the formation and consolidation of class identity and activity" (p. 471). In the 1860s, Marx would have changed his "conception of revolutionary change" (p. 467), focusing not upon "the violent seizure of power associated with twentieth-century communism but […] a social-democratic process propelled by 'pressure from without'" (p. 468). But Stedman Jones does not provide sufficient evidence for this interpretation, which he seems to contradict by quoting an 1868 letter to Ludwig Kugelmann in which Marx relates his own activity in the International to the broader goals of the "workers' party" (p. 481). It is also unclear how this position could be sustained given the increasing indifference on the part of British trade union leaders towards workers' struggles not only in Paris – Stedman Jones criticizes Marx for the political isolation in Britain to which his defence of the Commune condemned him – but also in the colonies, starting with Ireland. As a rich scholarship maintains, rather than expressing, as Stedman Jones claims, the dreams of a pre-1848 generation of intellectuals and an escape from his economic work, Marx's late studies of communal social formations reflected his continuing attempt at developing his revolutionary critique of capitalism as a global system.

The overall conclusion of Stedman Jones's biography is that Marx's illusion largely overshadows his greatness. More successful in founding the new field of social and economic history than in developing a compelling critique of capitalism (p. 430), Marx himself deserves to be confined within the nineteenth century. And yet, one cannot but wonder whether this verdict is grounded in a scholarly analysis of Marx's achievements or in a game of mirrors still largely informed by twentieth-century concerns.

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Pelz, William A. A People's History of Modern Europe. Pluto Press, London 2016. xiv, 273 pp. $100.00 (Paper $28.00); £58.50.

It takes gumption to write a large book about a controversial and difficult subject in a limited number of pages. William Pelz's recent overview, a people's history of Europe from

4. Lucia Pradella, *Globalization and the Critique of Political Economy: New Insights from Marx's Writings* (New York, 2015).