

## Was the 'Abolition of the State' a Common Slogan in Socialist Circles in 1840s Germany?

Roland Boer

This study began as an appendix for my book, *Friedrich Engels and the Foundations of Socialist Governance* (Springer, 2021). In my research for the book, I had come across one or two assertions that the 'abolition of the state' was a common slogan in socialist circles – including Marx and Engels – in Germany of the 1840s. So I decided to find out by examining all of the texts written by Marx and Engels in that decade. The key terms for my search were provided by the liberal proto-anarchist, Max Stirner, who asserted that the state can only 'be sublated [*aufheben*], annihilated [*vernichten*], abolished [*abschaffen*], not reformed' (Stirner 1845, 240). You may, of course, wonder: if Stirner used these terms, did not others also? The short answer is no. Like other socialists, Marx and Engels *did not* use these terms in the same way as Stirner. To get to this point required quite an amount of work, of the sort that is necessary to establish a major point, but it does not make for the most scintillating reading – unless you are given to this type of endeavour.

Now that the following is not part of the book, another question arises: did Marx and Engels later speak of the abolition of the state, as a willed and conscious act immediately after a proletarian revolution? Again, the answer is no. Instead, this was the position of the Anarchists, as their position became clarified with Bakunin in the late 1860s and early 1870s. For Marx and Engels, this approach was simply wrong-headed. In light of the method they had developed, the first task after a revolutionary seizure of power is to focus on socio-economic matters. For these tasks, the structures of the state, wielded by the working class, are absolutely necessary. At the same time, the state is a feature of the superstructure, a manifestation of class struggle (not its cause) and thus a separated public power. So what would happen to the state? Eventually, after a long process of socialist transition and construction, the state as it had come to be known would 'fall away' of its own accord, 'dissolve', 'disappear', or – as Engels famously put it in 1894 – 'die away'. In its place would emerge a de-politicised public power, standing in the midst of society, and focused on the administration of the stuff of life for the good of society.

This much I argue in the book on Engels, who provides most of the relevant material. Now for the task at hand: a careful analysis of the usages of *Abschaffung*, *Vernichtung*, and *Aufhebung*.

## Abschaffung

Let us begin with the key term, *Abschaffung* and its verbal form *abschaffen*.<sup>1</sup> First, it is used widely by Engels and Marx for acts of actual state governments, particularly in terms of the repeal of laws old and new. In other words, it is an internal process of governance, rather than relating to the state itself. Thus, it may concern laws in general, or laws of the older order: reactionary laws, censorship, human traffic and sale of souls, death penalty, whip, poor laws,<sup>2</sup> the property requirement for voting in England, penalties for prisoners or at the workplace, or even parliamentary standing orders.<sup>3</sup> Taxes too are in the firing line, whether all taxes or – more often – specific taxes: the corn tax is high on the list, but we also find consumption taxes, monopoly and duties.<sup>4</sup> A final group concerns the repeal of bourgeois laws as they struggled to gain control of the state: universal suffrage, right to association and armed militias, the ten-hour bill, and binding mandates.<sup>5</sup>

Second, it refers to more substantial aspects of state and economy, albeit mostly in relation to those of the past. In the somewhat eccentric history of Europe, this past is the feudal era with its many relics still present in the long transition to a capitalist mode of production. These relics include feudal burdens, aristocratic privileges, compulsory religion, conditions and property relations, monarchy and its privileges,<sup>6</sup> old principalities, the British House of Lords, hereditary serfdom, the lowest foundations of feudal relations in the countryside, and even the deft moves of the bourgeoisie in the 1848 revolution to abolish the king's power and establish their own in reality.<sup>7</sup> An intriguing subgroup relates

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1 I leave aside the more sarcastic literary flourishes, relating to truth, ignorance, illusions and 'history' (Marx and Engels 1845–1846, 139, 159, 165, 184, 192, 410, 446; 18480, 136).

2 Even though poverty itself cannot simply be abolished (Engels 1845c, 485; 1845e, 555).

3 In light of the number of references and the specific linguistic analysis, I cite only original German materials in the footnotes – in order of appearance in the text: Engels 1845a, 523; Marx and Engels 1849a, 219; 1849s, 516; 1849u, 449; 1845, 220; 1848a', 290; Engels 1847c, 255; 1845c, 496, 445, 451, 467; 1892, 644; 1844c, 577. It is worth noting that the vast majority of the articles published in *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* (MEW 5 and 6) were written by Engels.

4 Again, the citations appear in a footnote: Marx and Engels 1850h, 293; Engels 1842a, 449; 1843a, 458; 1844a, 521; 1844b, 551; 1845c, 251, 342, 446–448, 450, 479, 486, 489–490, 503–504; 1845d, 587–590; 1846, 595; 1892, 638, 643; Marx and Engels 1845–1846, 82, 337; Engels 1848b, 495; Marx and Engels 1849i, 327; 1850g, 272; 1850d, 303; Engels 1850c, 308; Marx and Engels 1850e, 472; 1848x, 4.

5 And again: Marx and Engels 1849q, 465; 1850e, 473, 474; 1848v, 239; 1849s, 516; Engels 1850c, 305, 312; Marx and Engels 1848q, 15.

6 Unlike social evils, which echoes the comment that poverty itself cannot simply be abolished by government decree (Engels 1845c, 485; 1845e, 555).

7 The citations appear here in the same order as the items mentioned in the text: Marx and Engels 1848x, 3; 1848y, 106; Engels 1839, 110; Marx and Engels 1848g, 279; 1848d, 310; 1848p, 402; Engels 1848c, 472; 1850b, 58;

to the appropriation and indeed transformation of feudal traces in the new situation. Engels's observations run in two directions: one to aristocratic titles appropriated by the bourgeoisie and the other to the abolition of taxes as the basis of 'bourgeois socialism' (Marx and Engels 1849t, 192; 1850h, 295).

By comparison, the lesser usage relates to features of a capitalist mode of production that must be abolished. Apart from private property (see more below), we find the abolition of class and class differences, wage labour itself, or the conflict between wage labour and capital or indeed the exploitation of the former by the latter.<sup>8</sup> Notably, these usages come late in the piece, in the early 1850s, as Engels and Marx began to clarify their position in the wake of the Communist Manifesto.<sup>9</sup>

From the midst of these sparse uses of *Abschaffung* in relation to the state, two usages rise to the surface. The first appears relatively late (in terms of the time period under analysis), in a review of Émile Girardin's *Le Socialisme et l'impôt*. Since Engels quotes the relevant section in his slightly later 'On the Slogan of the Abolition of the State', I refer the reader to the analysis of that text in the book itself. The second is intriguing since it hints that significant parts of a state structure may simply fall apart due to objective conditions. Writing of the struggle concerning the British House of Lords, Engels notes that while the radicals may want to reform the unelected peerage into a bourgeois democratic structure, the Chartists are simply not interested: they know that the 'whole rotten structure, Crown, Lords and so forth, must collapse of its own accord [*von selbst zusammenbrechen muß*]' (Engels 1844c, 571). This more objective and natural process, even though it is a passing thought here, would become much more important later in the struggle with Bakunin.

### Vernichtung

The obvious term to compare with *Abschaffung* is *Aufhebung*, particularly in light of the way these two terms would mark out anarchist and communist positions on the

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Marx and Engels 1850g, 272; Engels 1850a, 376; 1844a, 517; Marx and Engels 1849l, 308; Engels 1844c, 571; Marx and Engels 1845–1846, 204; 1848w, 79; 1848k, 108.

8 Again: Marx and Engels 1850b, 354; Engels 1852, 523, 524; Marx and Engels 1850e, 459; 1850g, 272.

9 While Engels was making – as part of their increasingly joint position – statements on such matters in texts like 'Principles of Communism' (see the book itself), Marx for his part began to identify, in texts such as 'The Poverty of Philosophy', the narrative outline that would emerge in the Communist Manifesto. For example: 'The condition for the emancipation of the working class is the abolition [*Abschaffung*] of all classes, just as the condition for the emancipation of the third estate, of the bourgeois order, was the abolition [*Abschaffung*] of all estates and all orders' (Marx 1847b, 181; see the original French at 1847a, 177; see also Marx 1847c, 357; 1847d, 520). Although the original text was written in French, a German translation was published in 1885.

state after a revolution and the gaining of power. However, as a mediation to my treatment of *Aufhebung* I present the results of the third term used by Stirner in his key sentence: *Vernichtung* (*vernichten* in its verbal form), with the senses of to reduce to nothing, annihilate or obliterate, especially in warfare.<sup>10</sup> The result of my analysis of the term's use in texts up to 1850 is simply this: *Vernichtung* is not used in referring to the state after a communist revolution, and the usage in relation to matters of central concern among the young socialists of the 1840s – private property being the most notable – is very sparse.

*Vernichtung* can be drawn into the orbit of a Hegelian dialectic, which we see with Moses Hess (see the book itself). For example, Engels writes: 'We destroy [*vernichten*] the contradiction simply by transcending [*aufheben*] it' (Engels 1844d, 489). Yet, it is more often used by Engels outside such an orbit to refer to complete annihilation. The former usage can be found mostly in Engels's earlier work, especially when he wrote a number of pseudonymous pieces criticising Schelling's 1842 lectures in Berlin (Engels 1842b, 280, 287, 298, 301, 304, 306, 314; 1842c, 325). It also appears with a similar sense in the first joint work between Engels and Marx, *The Holy Family* (1845, 37, 87, 98, 100, 134, 136, 164, 187, 188, 190–191, 197).<sup>11</sup> Yet, even here Engels distinguishes between a 'mere negation in the Hegelian sense' and what risks – in Schelling's philosophical theology – being 'totally destroyed [*vernichtet*], reduced to nothing [*auf ein Garnichts reducirt*,]', if not 'crushed [*ekrasirte*], swallowed [*verschlungene*], devoured [*aufgefressene*]' without any strength to 'reconstitute itself [*sich zu restituieren*]' (Engels 1842b, 286).

In this light, the overwhelming usage of *Vernichtung* relates to two dimensions of a capitalist market economy and its struggles: the destructive effects of capitalism itself and the disastrous effects of counter-revolution. As capitalism was infiltrating the pores of Western European society, Engels finds that *Vernichtung* best captures its effects and dynamic. Of course, it annihilates various aspects of feudalism,<sup>12</sup> including the Christian

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<sup>10</sup> Indeed, a significant number of references (25 up to 1850) use the term in relation to a war of annihilation. In what follows, I do not cite inconsequential uses, whether in relation to potato harvests, morality, or German literature.

<sup>11</sup> An intriguing dialectical usage appears in the slightly later work, *The German Ideology*, in which Engels and Marx anticipate the process to globalisation: 'the more the original isolation of the separate nationalities is annihilated [*vernichtet wird*] by the advanced mode of production, by intercourse and by the natural division of labour between various nations arising as a result, the more history becomes world history' (Marx and Engels 1845–1846, 45). *The German Ideology* contains a few further dialectical usages (Marx and Engels 1845–1846, 229).

<sup>12</sup> In order: Engels 1843b, 433; Marx and Engels 1845–1846, 177; 1848g, 279; 1848u, 294; 1848s, 345; 1848a, 445; Engels 1848b, 503; Marx and Engels 1849e, 244; 1849v, 513, 515; 1850g, 272; Engels 1852, 521.

church,<sup>13</sup> but the actual destructive dynamic of capitalism begins to appear regularly in Engels's two breakthrough works, 'Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy' (1844) and 'The Condition of the Working-Class in England' (1845). From the latter, we find references to the annihilation of previous craft enterprise, the last vestiges of workers' independence and working-class life itself, as well as the annihilation of the small bourgeoisie (Engels 1845c, 251, 255, 259, 425, 427, 429, 431). In the slightly earlier work – from which Marx drew so much – we find more dialectical observations, whether the annihilation of small monopolies so that the 'one great basic monopoly, property, may function the more freely' (Engels 1844d, 474), or the 'deepest degradation [*Erniedrigung*]' through competition that turns human beings into commodities, whose 'production and *Vernichtung*' depend entirely on demand and thus has 'slaughtered [*geschlachtet*]' millions (Engels 1844d, 491). To anticipate the later analysis, Engels then calls for the '*Aufhebung* of this degradation' through the '*Aufhebung* of private property, competition and the opposing interests' (Engels 1844d, 491). The internally destructive dynamic of capitalism continues to appear in later works, including the Communist Manifesto: we find repeated references to the *Vernichtung* of earlier industries and handicrafts, of manual and wage labour by machinery, of workers by the bourgeoisie, and the perpetual self-destruction of the forms of capitalism.<sup>14</sup>

Closely related and even more extensive is the use of *Vernichtung* to speak of the destructive effects of counter-revolution, especially after the 1848 European revolutions. These include the annihilation of revolutionary forces themselves, as well as newly won liberal democratic reforms, republican and parliamentary power, freedom of association and of the press, direct acts against workers,<sup>15</sup> or – more subtly – the annihilation of the

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13 'These consequences of the *Aufhebung* of the feudal system have been taken to such lengths by the social revolution in England that the crisis which will annihilate [*vernichten*] the Christian world order can no longer be far away, and indeed that the time of this crisis can be predicted with certainty, even if not quantitatively, in years, at least qualitatively; for this crisis must begin when the Corn Laws are repealed [*abgeschafft*] and the People's Charter introduced, in other words, when the aristocracy of birth has been politically overcome by the money aristocracy and the latter in turn by working-class democracy' (Engels 1844b, 546; see also Engels 1843b, 432).

14 In the order in which the references appear in the text: Marx and Engels 1845, 35; 1845–1846, 60; 1848d<sup>1</sup>, 466, 468, 470, 472, 485; Engels 1848a, 508; Marx and Engels 1848e, 128; 1848j, 288; 1849r, 421.

15 The full citations are as follows: Marx and Engels 1848n, 43; 1848z, 83; 1848k, 111; 1848o, 133; 1848h, 257; 1848u, 293; 1848f, 387–388; 1848p, 399; 1848i, 429; 1849c, 224, 230, 233; 1849e, 250; 1849p, 312; 1849h, 393; 1849j, 452; 1849q, 465; 1849w, 467; 1849f, 476; 1849m, 504; 1850f, 206, 209; 1850c, 221; 1850a, 261; 1850e, 472, 473; Engels 1850c, 312.

political power of the workers' movement by including it within the bourgeois parliamentary processes (Marx and Engels 1849c, 239).<sup>16</sup>

The other side of counter-revolution, as well as depredations of a capitalist market economy, concerns the central tasks of the communist movement. Communism – as Engels and Marx conceived it theoretically – would entail the *Vernichtung* of reaction, of landed property and even bourgeois influences on workers, which divert the latter from their revolutionary path (Marx and Engels 1848c<sup>1</sup>, 377; 1850f, 209; 1850a, 260). And of course, class antagonisms too would need to be annihilated, although the usage of *Vernichtung* for this necessity is rare indeed: 'For us the issue cannot be the alteration of private property but only its *Vernichtung*, not the smoothing over of class antagonisms but the *Aufhebung* of classes, not the improvement of the existing society but the foundation of a new one' (Marx and Engels 1850a, 258; Engels 1850c, 313).<sup>17</sup> At this point *Vernichtung* overlaps not only with *Abschaffung* (see above), but also anticipates the engagement with Stirner.

As we saw earlier, it was precisely Stirner who sought to bring *Aufhebung* into the orbit of *Abschaffung* through the mediation of *Vernichtung*. By now it should be clear that Engels and indeed Marx do not use *Vernichtung* in relation to the state as such.<sup>18</sup> While they use it primarily to speak of the effects of capitalism and counter-revolution, they use it occasionally in relation to private property, class conflict and reactionary forces, but not the state – except for a few pages in *The German Ideology* (see the book itself). On the other hand, they do use the term when dealing with Stirner's thought in *The German Ideology*, albeit with a twist. For Stirner, the state is not the only collective entity that must be annihilated by the 'individual': included here too are society, social bonds and morality, as well as communism itself (Marx and Engels 1845–1846, 187, 399, 450), for otherwise communism would destroy individuals, rentiers and even wealth (Marx and Engels 1845–

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16 A comparable example is the danger of splitting the workers' party, which would annihilate the centralisation and thereby the power (*Kraft*) of the party (Marx and Engels 1850a, 338).

17 A related usage appears in *The Holy Family*, where a further stage of Marx's original argument in 'Zur Judenfrage' appears. In the midst of a dialectical argument for the full realisation of slavery in *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* (unfortunately translated as 'civil society' (Boer 2018)), Engels and Marx point out that the fully realised modern state appears only with the *Vernichtung* of privilege, free industry, free trade, and so on (Marx and Engels 1845, 123).

18 On one occasion, Engels mentions that the 'proletarians can destroy [*vernichten*] nationalities' in terms of a working class that can bring about 'fraternisation between the different nations' (Engels 1845b, 614). But we need to be careful here, since 'nationality [*Nationalität*]' does not have the modern sense of nation-state, but instead designated distinct nationalities within a state.

1846, 199, 261).<sup>19</sup> The appropriate retort is, of course, that it is rather futile to speak of ideas annihilating real conditions (Marx and Engels 1845–1846, 90, 109, 127, 156, 243, 253, 273, 280, 416, 433, 455; see also Engels 1850d, 335).

### **Aufhebung**

The preferred usage by both Engels and Marx is *Aufhebung*, or *aufheben* in its verbal form. Its semantic field is the widest of the three terms under investigation, ranging from a simpler annulment or repeal (especially of laws), through abolition (close to *Abschaffung*) and dissolution (here it is close to *Auflösung*), to the preferred Hegelian sense of negation and transformation, if not transcendence, for which the closest English term – derived from Latin – is sublation. In Engels's works, we find a range of uses, which may be read in two overlapping ways: to begin with, *Aufhebung* may be used in different senses depending on the context, with a particular aspect of its semantic field deployed for a specific purpose; to go a step further, the word also invokes its wider semantic field, which in Engels's (and Marx's) usage tends to be saturated by the dialectical sense inherited from Hegel. Obviously, these two ways of seeing the usage of *Aufhebung* are not mutually exclusive, but the striking result of my research is that the word is rarely used for the state as such in works before 1850. The closest that Engels comes is in terms of private property, for which he also occasionally uses *Abschaffung* (see above). However, the preferred usage is *Aufhebung*,<sup>20</sup> especially in two significant locations: the engagement with Proudhon in *The Holy Family* and the treatment in 'The Principles of Communism' (see the book itself).

*Aufhebung* often functions as an alternative term for *Abschaffung*, particularly when it refers to the acts of existing states in repealing laws and when it refers to the overcoming of European feudalism through the rise of capitalism. We have seen both uses earlier in relation to *Abschaffung*, but let me outline the main ways *Aufhebung* is used in such a fashion before reflecting on the consequences. Many are the laws that a state may repeal, with the only distinction being whether such repeals are progressive (in a liberal sense) or reactionary. For example, more liberal repeals include those of censorship, the Irish union with England, the English apostasy act, the Corn Law, cartels, bridge tolls, guild

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<sup>19</sup> In his early 'Zentralisation und Freiheit', Engels strikes a curiously similar note in relation to the state, although the later part of the text is more dialectical: 'By assuming a right which belongs only to history, the state destroys [*vernichtet*] the freedom of the individual' (Engels 1842d, 624).

<sup>20</sup> I leave aside the inconsequential usages of *Aufhebung*, ranging from moments of sensual love, through the annulments of banquets, to eliminating tensions between groups in the International and of the union of Protestant churches in Germany.

rights and associated restrictions, the Danish feudal Sound Tax, property tax exemptions, penal laws, or simply bad and reactionary laws.<sup>21</sup> The only contrast within this category is with those reactionary repeals – in response to the 1848 revolutions – that target relatively liberal gains. These include repeals of the people's right (*Volksrecht*), freedom of the press, laws and tribunals, constitutional guarantees, the Rhine Law, the ten-hour bill, and universal suffrage.<sup>22</sup>

More significant for my analysis is the way *Aufhebung* is used to refer to the internal dynamics of a capitalist market economy. These include the overcoming or sublation of European feudalism (Engels 1844b, 546), or of specific features of the feudal system such as patriarchal relationships, handicrafts, former social formations, serfdom, peasantry, feudal burdens and rights, as well as guild master privileges.<sup>23</sup> But as Engels points out, none of these transformations relieve the burdens of the masses, for they produce a new power, the bourgeoisie (Engels 1847a, 40–41). This point is of course a dialectical one, not merely on a Hegelian register<sup>24</sup> but specifically as a materialist reshaping of the dialectic. Indeed, it was during the highly creative decade of the 1840s that both Engels and Marx first identified the rudimentary outlines of dialectical materialism – most notably in the notes that became *The German Ideology* – and then refined it by the end of the decade.

In this light should we understand the way Engels deploys *Aufhebung* to understand the internal tensions within a capitalist market economy, mostly notably in two works that deeply influenced Marx, 'Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy' and

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21 Given the number of citations, they appear here: Engels 1842e, 384; 1843a, 464; 1844c, 581; 1842a, 450; 1844a, 521; 1845c, 447; Marx and Engels 1845–1846, 497; 1848l, 228; 1850d, 302; Engels 1850c, 310; Marx and Engels 1850e, 460; Engels 1850b, 68; Marx and Engels 1848c, 44; 1848d, 313; 1848h, 258; 1848k, 120; 18490, 343; 1848b', 272–275.

22 Again: Marx and Engels 1848b, 27; 1848m, 52; 1849g, 441; 1849b, 485; 1849k, 494; 1849d, 365; Engels 1850c, 313; Marx and Engels 1850e, 473, 475. See also Marx's earlier comment in a letter to Arnold Rüge that Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia attempted a reactionary and 'unsuccessful attempt to sublate [*aufzuheben*] the philistine state on its own basis' (Marx 1843b, 52).

23 And again: Engels 1845c, 251, 474; Marx and Engels 1845–1846, 34, 77, 204, 205, 335; 1848y, 106, 107; 1848g, 278–283; 1848d, 313; Engels 1848c, 473; Marx and Engels 1849t, 192; Engels 1850b, 58, 64; Marx and Engels 1850a, 261.

24 This is not to say there are more purely Hegelian moments, whether in relation to English 'national character' (Engels 1844b, 541, 543) or the *Aufhebung* of theology: this may entail the internal dialectics of theology (Engels 1842b, 306–307; 1842c, 329; Marx and Engels 1845–1846, 117), the *Aufhebung* of religion (Marx and Engels 1845, 94, 105, 121), or indeed the *Aufhebung* of atheism itself, which entails 'giving back to the human person the substance lost through religion; not as divine but as human substance' (Engels 1844a, 531).

*The Condition of the Working-Class in England*. Three instances stand out,<sup>25</sup> the first of which is the contradiction between capital and labour. Engels writes that capital and labour are initially identical, but that capital is transformed – as the result of labour – into the substratum or material of labour itself; appropriated once again in the process of labour, the separation between them is 'immediately sublated [*aufgehoben wird*] by the unity of both' (Engels 1844d, 480). Engels already anticipates the way competition at all levels would eventually lead to the '*Aufhebung* of opposing interests', albeit now in its 'proper and rational sphere' (Engels 1844d, 485–486).<sup>26</sup> Second, monopoly and competition, which is a constitutive contradiction of a capitalist market economy: while monopoly produces free competition, the latter produces monopoly; yet, this unresolved dialectical tension cannot hold out forever, so both must fall and their 'difficulties must be resolved through the *Aufhebung* of the principle which gives rise to them' (Engels 1844d, 492; see also Marx and Engels 1848j, 288).

Third: the *Aufhebung* of the dialectic of competition, between workers, between capitalists, and between workers and capitalists. In an astute passage of *The Condition of the Working-Class in England*, Engels writes of the function of union organisation and strikes, even though many such strikes fail. Why continue to struggle and strike? The key is to overcome competition between workers for jobs and wages. If workers combine and struggle together, a crucial feature of a capitalist market economy is undermined. Secondary to this process is of course competition between capitalists, who seek to reduce wages when possible and yet are forced to raise them when other capitalists raise wages. The problem is that such competition will not solve the underlying problem on its own, so each effort by workers to unite and struggle together is the first step to the abolition and transformation of competition itself – '*der erste Versuch der Arbeiter sind, die Konkurrenz aufzuheben*'. This is merely the first step, for the law of wages under a capitalist market economy determines that competition among workers will return, so the ultimate aim is to abolish and sublate competition altogether – '*die Konkurrenz überhaupt aufzuheben*' (Engels 1845c, 436–437, see also 451).

Capital and labour, monopoly and competition – already in these early works Engels anticipates their *Aufhebung* in the step beyond capitalism. But the item that attracts most of his attention is private property. The main treatments of private property

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25 One may add the tension between production and consumption: 'in order to restore the unity of the two and *aufzuheben* all contradictions, one need only *interpret* these contradictions correctly and *comprehend* the true *nature* of production and consumption' (Marx and Engels 1845–1846, 503).

26 *The Holy Family* points out the uselessness of the Young Hegelian effort to sublate the contradiction of wage labour and capital in the realm of pure thought alone (Marx and Engels 1845, 56).

appear in *The Holy Family* and the 'Principles of Communism' (see the book itself), but Engels makes some initial observations in 'Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy'. Thus, the contradiction between inherent and determined utility (*Brauchbarkeit*), or between use and exchange, cannot be superseded or 'sublated [*aufheben*] without sublating [*aufzuheben*] private property; and once this is sublated [*aufgehoben ist*], there can no longer be any question of exchange as it exists at present [*jetzt existirt*]' (Engels 1844d, 477). This text clearly uses *aufheben* in a dialectical sense, with the English translation of MECW offering 'supersede' (Engels 1844i, 426), and with Engels's observation that the result of superseding private property would not be the simple abolition of exchange, but its inability to continue to exist as it does at present. The implication is that it will continue, but in a transformed way.<sup>27</sup> This point comes out more clearly with the slightly later observation that capitalism increasingly leads to the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few and the pauperisation of the rest, 'unless it is anticipated by a total transformation [*Umgestaltung*] of social conditions, a fusion of opposed interests, an *Aufhebung* of private property' (Engels 1844d, 491). Under these transformed conditions would private property too continue in a dialectically transformed way?<sup>28</sup> Engels may hint at the possibility, but at other times he sees it as the foundation of capitalist competition, which leads to the 'degradation [*Erniedrigung*]' of humanity. The answer: 'the *Aufhebung* of this degradation of humanity through the *Aufhebung* of private property, competition and the opposing interests' (Engels 1844d, 490).

This brings me at last to the *Aufhebung* enacted by communism, which, according to the early 'Rules of the Communist League' (second draft), involves the 'overthrow [*Sturz*] of the bourgeoisie, the rule of the proletariat, the *Aufhebung* of the old bourgeois society which rests on the antagonism of classes [*Klassengegensätzen*], and the foundation of a new society without classes and without private property' (Engels and Schapper 1847, 596).<sup>29</sup> These items, with minor variations, were part of a standard list that we already saw emerging with Engels's earlier observations on the competition and contradictions among

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<sup>27</sup> As the next sentence suggests in relation to value under a qualitatively different system: 'The practical application of the concept of value will then be increasingly confined to the decision about production, and that is its proper sphere' (Engels 1844d, 477).

<sup>28</sup> This possibility also emerges in a curious sentence in the introduction to 'Outlines', where Engels offers an analogy with theology, which 'must either regress to blind faith or progress towards free philosophy': so also would free trade produce the 'restoration of monopolies on the one hand and the *Aufhebung* of private property on the other' (Engels 1844d, 472). The more obvious sense is that 'free philosophy' (which Engels espoused as a replacement for his earlier faith) is analogous to communism, which requires the *Aufhebung* of private property. However, another implication arises, in which capitalism itself leads to monopolies and thereby the cancellation and transformation of private property. In other words, capitalism undermines one of its own foundations.

workers, capitalists, and between workers and capitalists. These would need to undergo an *Aufhebung* in the transformation to communism. Elsewhere, we find similar points recurring: the *Aufhebung* of class antagonism and struggle (Marx and Engels 1848r, 450; Engels 1852, 522), or the struggle between the interests of workers and the bourgeoisie (Marx and Engels 1849r, 416).<sup>30</sup> None of this, of course, can be done merely by thought alone, as some of the Young Hegelians imagined (Marx and Engels 1845, 203–204).

Let me sum up: not unexpectedly, *Aufhebung* was used widely by Engels (and Marx), given the Hegelian influence on German thought and on the early communist movement. We have found it deployed in relation to the repeal of laws, the transformation of feudalism to European capitalism, the internal tensions of a capitalist market economy, private property, and in the qualitative shift to communism. Throughout, I have noted the overlaps with both *Abschaffung* and *Vernichtung*, which are also used for nearly all of these items. At times, the terms function as stylistic variations for largely the same meaning. Let me give a few examples:

1. In a critique of Karl Herzen, Engels speaks of the necessary steps 'in preparation for the *Abschaffung* of private property', of the 'temporary transitional stages towards the *Abschaffung* of private property'. In between these two occurrences, Engels speaks of the need for the proletariat to 'go further and further until the complete [*gänzlichen*] *Aufhebung* of private property' (Engels 1847b, 313, 322).

2. In their criticism of Thomas Carlyle, Engels and Marx point out that Carlyle mingles bourgeois measures such as the *Vernichtung* of the vestiges of feudalism and the reduction of the state to a minimum so that bourgeois relations may flourish, with communist measures: 'the *Aufhebung* of these same bourgeois relations, with the *Abschaffung* of the conflict between capital and wage labour, with the overthrow [*Sturz*] of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat' (Marx and Engels 1850g, 272).

3. In a summary of the communist project, Engels and Marx observe: 'the issue cannot be the alteration [*Veränderung*] of private property but only its annihilation

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29 A minor usage concerns the efforts of reaction after the 1848 revolutions in Europe, whether in relation to the *Aufhebung* of political agitation (by which is meant freedom of the press, association and other liberal gains) (Marx and Engels 1848l, 229) or the *Aufhebung* of the few liberal phrases in the constitution and the effort to restore the old order (Marx and Engels 1849g, 436; 1848b, 27), even if these efforts were somewhat bumbling and wishful (Marx and Engels 1848t, 77; 1849n, 264).

30 Note also Marx's comparable observations on the *Aufhebung* of the competition between workers, between labour and capital, of class relations, wage labour and capital, as well as profit itself (Marx 1847e, 554; 1847b, 104; 1850, 147, 182). Note that 'The Poverty of Philosophy' originally appeared in French, with a German translation appearing in 1884. A rough early approach to this dialectic, through the category of individual and community, may be found in *The German Ideology* (Marx and Engels 1845–1846, 74–75).

[*Vernichtung*], not the smoothing over [*Vertuschung*] of class antagonisms but the *Aufhebung* of classes, not the improvement [*Verbesserung*] of the existing society but the foundation [*Gründung*] of a new one' (Marx and Engels 1850a, 258).<sup>31</sup>

At the same time, each of the terms also has different emphases and concentrations of usage. Thus, *Abschaffung* tends to be deployed for either the abolition of feudalism and its relics or the internal acts of existing states; *Vernichtung* is concentrated in the areas of counter-revolution and the destructive effects of capitalism; and *Aufhebung* tends to be used for the internal contradictions of a capitalist market economy and the transformation to communism.

The purpose of this time-consuming task – now relegated to an appendix – was to identify whether *Aufhebung* was used in such a fashion. As is the case with scholarly or scientific research, the results sometimes may be negative: *Aufhebung* is used rarely, if at all, in relation to state as such, even in light of the theoretical projections as to what socialism in power might entail.<sup>32</sup> As we have seen, the same result also applies to *Abschaffung* and *Vernichtung*.

#### NOTE:

The same conclusion applies to a number of related terms, which I do not cite here but have checked carefully:

- 1 *Zerstörung*, which is used primarily for the destructive effects of war, feudalism through the rise of capitalism, and the internally destructive effects on workers within capitalism.

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<sup>31</sup> A somewhat more distant example appears in the critical piece on Girardin's 'socialism', in which 'bad' socialism entails (among other items), the *Aufhebung* of family ties, while 'good' socialism, with its harmony of labour and capital, entails the *Abschaffung* of ignorance (Marx and Engels 1850h, 290).

<sup>32</sup> In *The Holy Family*, a sustained dialectical argument appears concerning the modern European bourgeois state and its attendant capitalist relations, which are the full realisation of many feudal features that are now unleashed: constitutional monarchy in terms of the republican state; the overcoming of slavery so that *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* is the full realisation of the slavery of all; the removal of privileges (guilds, land, trade, religion) as the basis for the universalisation of industry, private property, capitalist market economy and privatised religion (Marx and Engels 1845, 121–123; see also Marx and Engels 1845–1846, 329). This is clearly a development of Marx's criticism of Bruno Bauer, which first appeared in 'Zur Judenfrage' (Marx 1844c; see also Marx 1844a, 263; 1844b, 389). So also an early polemical assertion by Marx: 'If the *coercive state* wanted to be loyal, it would sublimate itself [*höbe er sich auf*]' (Marx 1843a, 118). In a rare moment, Engels writes in English: 'The working men got up several insurrections, for the abolition of political monopoly, and the establishment of a republic, but were always defeated; the middle class having not only the army on their side, but forming themselves the national guard besides' (Engels 1843c, 501). The German translation of this text in MEW offers *zu brechen* (Engels 1843d, 484).

- 2 *Auflösung*, which is often deployed – much like Hegel's criticism of *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* – in relation to the dissolution under capitalism of a host of older – especially feudal – forms of collective identity, such as the family, religion and society as such (by contrast, Stirner's radical liberalism has the 'ego' dissolve all forms of collective life, including the state and communism (Marx and Engels 1845–1846, 223)). After the 1848 European revolutions, it also appears frequently to speak of the effects of counter-revolutionary measures to dissolve not only revolutionary movements and popular organisations, but also a number of liberal reforms and parliamentary bodies.
- 3 *Negation* (*negieren*), and the associated *Verneinung*, which are even more strictly Hegelian than *Aufhebung*. The term appears very frequently in material up to the mid-1840s, only to fall away significantly by the second half of the decade. In this light, it is concentrated in *The Holy Family* and *The German Ideology*, occasionally in reference to private property but never with the state. Marx speaks of the 'Christian state' being the 'Christian negation [*Verneinung*]' of the state, only to make the dialectical move to point out that the modern bourgeois is the full realization of the Christian state (Marx 1844c, 151). In the 'Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844', he writes of communism being the '*Negation der Negation*' through the intermediary of the '*Negation*' of private property, but this remains in the realm of ideas. What is needed is concrete communist action (Marx 1844a, 289; 1844b, 425). As for Engels, he speaks on only one occasion of the negation of the state, but in terms of the effects of the 'political Reformation', which revived the state by giving it some actual content as the basis for modern European political development (Engels 1844b, 545).

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