

## ***Historical-Critical Dictionary of Marxism as a Common Project***

Nearly one thousand scholars from all around the world are contributing to the *Historical-Critical Dictionary of Marxism*, a huge international project being published in German under the title *Historisch-kritisches Wörterbuch des Marxismus* (HKWM). The first volume was published in 1994 and now seven volumes, some of them consisting of two books, and altogether around 800 articles have been printed on 8306 columns. Work on volume 7/II, consisting of entries starting with the letter K, is now intensive.

The project is about a quarter of century old. Like the great *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert that started as a translation and enlargement of Ephraim Chambers' *Cyclopaedia or an Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* of 1728, HKWM started as a plan to publish some supplement volumes to the German translation of Georges Labica's and Gerard Bensussan's *Dictionnaire critique du marxisme* (1st edition 1982). The planned supplement articles grew in number and in 1989 as the last volume of the translation came out the publication plan for the new dictionary under the editorship of Wolfgang Fritz Haug was announced. It seems the time could hardly have been more unfavourable; after "Perestroika" followed the downfall of the state administrative socialism and Marxism went definitively out of mode. Having lost its bureaucratic patrons it was left on the street without masters. However, this opened up new possibilities for cooperation and critique.

HKWM concentrates on concepts and there are no entries devoted individuals or political organisations. Historical-critical approach means sifting the concepts, their contested history and current relevance from the perspective of the pressing needs for a solidary and ecologically sustainable economy and society – thus also such recent concepts like 'hacker' or 'internet' are included. Indeed, new information technology has been crucial help in the collective production of the HKWM; in keeping contact with writers, commenting the manuscripts and organising the editorial process. Also the forthcoming English and Spanish versions will be first published in the internet, one very practical reason being that the original German order of the articles cannot be followed in other languages. Also a *Historisch-kritisches Wörterbuch des Feminismus*, based on the articles in the HKWM, has been published.

Despite the size, quality and importance of the project it has never received federal research funding in Germany and it has thus been carried out as a common international and civil societal project. Instead of fixed definitions and hierarchical orthodoxies we can discover in the HKWM an emerging web of conceptual tools, a new evolving 'language' for handling the pressing problems we encounter. With the current crisis of capitalism the project once described by Fredric Jameson as a "message in the bottle" for a different future has proven its contemporary relevance.