**Engels: On Engels's So-called "Political Testament" in His Later Years: Clarification of a Historical Case**

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**Summary**

In the Introduction to Karl Marx's Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850, published in 1895, Engels highly praised the important role and positive significance of parliamentary struggle, which aroused widespread debate among later generations. Bernstein used the Introduction to attribute Engels to the source of his revisionist views. Through the investigation of the writing background and the original draft of the Introduction, as well as the analysis of Engels' struggle strategy in the 1870s, this article believes that Engels always determined his struggle strategy according to the specific struggle situation, and his views in his later years did not change; Engels was not the source of revisionism, on the contrary, he was Bernstein's severe critic in its embryonic stage. The spirit of seeking truth from facts and starting from reality in the Introduction is the real legacy that Engels left to future generations.

In 1895, five months before his death, Engels wrote an introduction to the first published single volume of The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850, entitled "Introduction to Karl Marx's Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850" (hereinafter referred to as "Introduction").

In this text, Engels highly praised the important role and positive significance of legal struggle, especially parliamentary struggle, which aroused extensive discussion among later generations. In particular, E. Bernstein called this article Engels' "political testament" and further concluded that the revolutionary means of class struggle are no longer necessary, and capitalist society will grow into socialist society peacefully. This raises a major theoretical question for us: Did Engels abandon the ideas of proletarian class struggle and violent revolution in his later years and fundamentally turn to the pacifist line? Furthermore, did Engels become the real source of Bernstein's revisionism? All these issues must be thoroughly clarified and fully explained.

**1. Self-reflection in the Introduction**

At the end of January 1895, Richard Fischer, the publishing manager of the German Social Democratic Party’s official newspaper Vorwarts, wrote to Engels, saying that Vorwarts Publishing House intended to publish a series of articles on the French Revolution of 1848 published by Marx in the Neue Rheinische Zeitung. Political and Economic Review as a separate volume, and asked Engels to write an introduction for it. Engels readily agreed and wrote the introduction for this pamphlet from February 14 to March 6. In the introduction, Engels pointed out that "the methods of struggle in 1848 are outdated in all respects today". As a result, the issue of the transformation of the proletariat's struggle methods became the core theme of Engels' discussion.

First, a simple surprise attack could not achieve the transformation of society. Engels pointed out that Europe began to gradually revive from the middle of 1848, and reached full prosperity in 1849 and 1850. With this period of prosperity, the capitalist mode of production truly developed in many European countries. Correspondingly, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie were truly formed as the two major classes. Engels pointed out that since the proletariat had to advance slowly and gradually seize positions, this shows how impossible and unrealistic it was to achieve social transformation through a revolution or a surprise attack in 1848.

Second, the political practice of the German Social Democratic Party opened up new areas for the struggle of the working class. Engels listed one by one the impressive achievements made by the German Social Democratic Party in the three-yearly elections of the Imperial Parliament since the implementation of universal suffrage in 1866. He pointed out that German workers "gave comrades from all over the world a new weapon - one of the sharpest weapons, showing them how to use universal suffrage." In Engels' view, universal suffrage gave the proletariat a brand-new way of struggle, which enabled it to win significant benefits for itself within the scope of the rule of the bourgeoisie.

**Third, the old-style uprisings, especially street battles, have become outdated.**

Engels pointed out that before 1848, if the insurgents wanted to win in street fighting and street battles, they could at most influence and shake the morale of the army morale, and thus win the victory of the uprising by having the soldiers defect or take a passive attitude. But after the 1848 revolution, this moral influence had disappeared. Engels specifically mentioned that the streets newly built after 1848 were long, straight and wide, and were not suitable for street battles at all. Therefore, under the new historical conditions, the old-style uprisings, street battles and other struggle methods are obviously no longer appropriate.

It can be seen that Engels made a profound reflection on the changes in the conditions and methods of struggle after the 1848 Revolution in the Introduction, and the expressions he repeatedly used in the article, such as "we were wrong", "our wrong view at that time", "we were wrong", etc., also showed Engels' serious and sincere self-criticism. However, these self-reflections in the Introduction were used by Bernstein to prove his revisionist views. We can't help but ask, did Engels really advocate a fundamental revision of the strategy of armed struggle and violent revolution in his later years and completely turn to the pacifist line of parliamentary struggle?

In other words, did Engels encounter a reformist change in his later years?

II. Historical Preview Engels’ Ideas 20 Years Ago

In order to determine whether Engels' views changed in his later years, we need to first examine Engels' overall attitude towards the two methods of parliamentary struggle and violent means around 1878.

**First, the strategy of parliamentary struggle as the main force and revolutionary struggle as the auxiliary force before 1878**

In early 1877, the German Social Democratic Party once again won a major victory in the Imperial Parliament elections. Engels talked about this major achievement in a series of articles. The most noteworthy one is the article "Letter to En. Biniami on the German Election of 1877".

In this short and powerful article, Engels not only enthusiastically praised the great achievements of the German election in 1877, but also expressed a clear attitude towards another form of struggle - revolution. He said, "Some people will say, then why don't you use these forces to carry out the revolution now? Because we have only obtained 600,000 votes out of 5.5 million votes, and these votes are scattered in various regions. We will obviously be defeated. If we hold an ill-considered uprising and take rash actions, we will bury a movement ourselves..." Obviously, for Engels, when the mass base is still weak and the power comparison between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is still disparate, a hasty revolutionary struggle will only make the existing struggle results go to waste. However, does this mean that Engels fundamentally denies the revolution itself? Not so. He pointed out with great foresight that **"the Prussians...will not fail to take countermeasures; however, the more severe the reaction and repression, the higher the waves will be, until finally all the dams will be washed away**." The metaphor here fully reflects Engels' revolutionary stand and attitude.

**Second, the emphasis on revolution after the Anti-Socialist Law came into force**

As Engels expected, in October 1878, the German Imperial Parliament passed the Extraordinary Anti-Socialist Law, and the German Social Democratic Party fell into an illegal state.

In the article **"The Extraordinary Anti-Socialist Law in Germany - The Current Situation in Russia"** written in March 1879, Engels pointed out with the optimism unique to revolutionaries **that "the Anti-Socialist Law will produce results that will are particularly beneficial to us. It will complete the revolutionary education of German workers."**

The so-called "revolutionary education" here refers to the education about revolutionary struggle and violent methods.” In Engels' view, it was the Anti-Socialist Extraordinary Law concocted by the Bismarck government that awakened the Social Democrats from the intoxication of parliamentary struggle. They finally realized that the bourgeoisie would never give up state power easily. When the Social Democratic Party's upward momentum becomes unstoppable, the bourgeoisie will openly use violent means to deprive it of the opportunity to win legally. Therefore, the Social Democrats must abandon the beautiful fantasy of legal struggle and truly embark on the road of revolution.

**Third, criticism of the reformist line within the German Social Democratic Party**

It was based on the new struggle situation caused by the Extraordinary Anti-Socialist Law that Engels was deeply dissatisfied with the German Social Democratic Party's adherence to the previous legal struggle line. Engels’ severe criticism of this struggle strategy was concentrated on the Michael Kaiser incident.

In May 1879, at the instruction of the Social Democratic Party's Imperial Parliament Party Group, Social Democrat Michael Kaiser delivered a speech defending the Bismarck government's protective tariffs bill.

With the preparation of the Social Democratic Party's new organ, the Social Democrat, in Switzerland, the Kaiser incident began to ferment. At that time, Bernstein, who was in Zurich, invited German Social Democrat Karl Hirsch, who was in Paris, to serve as the editor of the new organ.

However, it was precisely because of their different attitudes towards the Kaiser incident that Bernstein and Hirsch had serious differences, which led to the breakdown of negotiations. On the one hand, Hirsch was severely critical of the Kaiser incident; on the other hand, Bernstein was completely tolerant of the Kaiser incident. Bernstein argued that for the new newspaper, "incidents such as the attack on Kaiser, which had caused unanimous condemnation from all comrades, should be avoided at all costs." Similarly, Social Democratic leader Ludwig Viereck also argued that the Social-Democrat should "adopt a calm and restrained stance."

In September 1879, after fully communicating with Marx, Engels personally drafted the famous "Notice Letter to Austrian Bebel, Wilhelm Liebknecht, Wilhelm Brack and others". In the letter, Engels expressed his support for Hirsch and further criticized the so-called "calm and restrained" arguments of Bernstein and Viereck. Engels pointed out that "Viereck is no less hardworking than Bernstein; the reason why Viereck thinks Bernstein is the right person is precisely because he is too moderate, because we cannot set sail with a clear banner now." In Engels' view, at the critical moment of life and death under reactionary suppression, the German Social Democratic Party should resolutely express its position and attitude, and fight back with a tough and resolute struggle, so as to truly embody the true nature of a serious revolutionary party.

**III. The Deleted Introduction and the Erased Revolution**

From the above tracing, we can know that in the 1870s, Engels's struggle strategy for the German Social Democratic Party had a process of transformation from emphasizing legal struggle to emphasizing revolutionary struggle, and the node was the Anti-Socialist Law implemented in 1878. So, what was the situation of the struggle in 1895 when he wrote the "Introduction"?

First, the Draft Anti-Subversion Law Behind Engels’ Introduction

In early March 1895, Fischer, commissioned by the Executive Committee of the German Social Democratic Party, wrote to Engels to ask him to accept their suggestions for the softened version of the "Introduction".

On March 8, Engels replied to Fischer, expressing his general agreement with the Executive Committee's revision suggestions, except for three deletions. The three deletions are: first, the "bloodshed and sacrifice" in the original text "the masses...must find out for themselves what this is for, what they are fighting for and shed blood and sacrifice" was deleted; second, the sentence "unprepared attacks, retreating to a secondary position everywhere" in the original text was deleted; third, the "now" in the original text "now the Social Democratic Party is subverting by abiding by the law" was deleted.

Engels added: **“My view is that you have nothing to gain by advocating complete abstention from force. Nobody would believe you, nor would any party in any country go so far to forfeit the right to resist illegality by force of arms. I also have to take account of the fact that my stuff is read by foreigners as well… and I simply cannot compromise myself to that extent in their eyes.”**

So why did the Executive Committee of the Social Democratic Party delete these places?

It turned out that in December 1894, the German government submitted the "Draft Anti-Subversion Law" against the Social Democratic Party to the Imperial Parliament, suggesting that those who deliberately overthrow the current state order by violence should be severely punished. It was against this background that the Executive Committee hoped that Engels would revise the "Introduction" in order to dilute the violence and revolutionary color in it as much as possible.

**Second, Engels’ basic attitude and position**

It can be seen from his letter to Fischer that Engels could not agree with the Social Democratic Party's response strategy to the Anti-Subversion Law Draft. "I cannot tolerate your pledge of loyalty to absolute observance of the law, to obey the law under all circumstances, even to those laws that have been violated by their legislators."

For this reason, Engels firmly demanded that the first two original texts mentioned above be retained, thereby defending the proper status of revolutionary struggle and violent activities. As for the word "now" that Engels firmly demanded to be retained in the third change, it especially reflects his emphasis on the timeliness of the struggle strategy. This means that legal struggle and parliamentary struggle are not fundamental and indisputable principles, but only a way of struggle and a struggle strategy that changes with time and place.

**Third, the original appearance of the Introduction**

In 1895, the full text of the Introduction was published in the separate volumes of The New Era and The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850.

No one knew that it had been revised due to the special circumstances, and it was on this official version that Bernstein kidnapped Engels as the source of his revisionist views. However, 30 years later, in 1925, based on the manuscripts of Engels collected from Berlin, Soviet scholar David Ryazanov published all the details of the edits of the Introduction in the German publication Under the Banner of Marxism, thus presenting the true face of this important text to the world for the first time. We found that not only two of the three changes that Engels insisted on restoring the original appearance were still retained (only the word "now" in the third place was restored), but also many contents about violence, revolution, struggle, etc. that violated the legal struggle strategy were deleted, which involved not only words and sentences, but also large paragraphs. Therefore, this original draft of the Introduction allows us to truly see the complete original appearance of Engels' thoughts.

**IV. Clarification of Engels’ Thoughts**

From the above analysis, we can see that only by basing ourselves on the original draft of the "Introduction" and Engels' complete explanation can we truly grasp the original image of Engels' thoughts, and then clarify and answer the major theoretical issues related to the "Introduction".

**First, did Engels’ views change in his later years?**

As mentioned above, the German Social Democratic Party made great strides in parliamentary elections in the 1870s. Engels spoke highly of this victory in many articles. Engels’ arguments give us a strong sense of déjà vu, because similar arguments are everywhere in the "Introduction" written in 1895.

It can be seen that whether in the 1870s or the 1890s, at the climax of the parliamentary struggle, Engels was quite positive about legal struggle and parliamentary elections, while armed struggle and violent revolution were secondary ways of struggle in his view and should be treated with caution. However, when the struggle situation changed dramatically, Engels would adjust the struggle strategy in a timely manner. After the implementation of the Anti-Socialist Exceptional Law in 1878, Engels changed his previous attitude of supporting parliamentary struggle and fundamentally opposed the legal struggle line blindly adhered to by the Social Democrats; and when the reactionary government concocted the "Draft Anti-Subversion Law" in early 1895, Engels once again firmly advocated the revolutionary stand and attitude, and tried to reserve space and possibility for the final decisive battle, street fighting, bloodshed, sacrifice and violent struggle in the "Introduction".

Therefore, whether it was the 1870s or the 1890s, whether it was the climax of parliamentary struggle or the harsh period of reactionary repression, Engels would choose specific struggle strategies according to the specific struggle situation. And it is precisely because of the similar development trajectory of the struggle situation in these two periods that we can see that the struggle strategies adopted by Engels at different stages were the same and consistent. This shows that there was no fundamental change in Engels' struggle strategy in his later years.

**Second, is Engels the source of Bernstein’s revisionism?**

From a point of view, the above examination of the original draft of the Introduction has fully proved that Engels did not fundamentally deny the revolutionary struggle in his later years, but such an answer is not comprehensive and complete enough.

I believe that the examination of this issue should be based on the Introduction, but should not be limited to the Introduction; we should examine both Engels and Bernstein. If Bernstein officially put forward the revisionist argument in the late 19th century, then in the analysis of Engels' struggle strategy in the 1870s, we also found the initial signs of Bernstein's revisionism. As Engels criticized, "the reason why Viereck thought Bernstein was a suitable person was because he was too moderate." The word "moderate" here can be said to be a word, which fundamentally reveals Bernstein's reformist tendency.

Bernstein in the late 19th century went even further. The revisionist views he put forward in The Premises of Socialism and the Tasks of Social Democracy (hereinafter referred to as "Premises") published in 1899 had completely deviated from Marxism.

However, Bernstein defended his views with The New Era and the revised "Introduction" in the separate volume, thus dragging Engels into the quagmire of revisionism. **How did the deceased Engels defend himself?**

We were pleasantly surprised to find that it was when criticizing the article "Retrospective of the German Socialist Movement" in the 1870s that Engels left a very wonderful comment.

It was like a prophetic defense, responding to and clarifying Bernstein's future distortion and use of himself in advance. Engels pointed out that according to the views of Bernstein and others, "the party should not give priority to those long-term goals that can scare away the bourgeoisie and are indeed unattainable by our generation. It is better for it to use all its strength and energy to realize such petty-bourgeois patchwork reforms, which will give new support to the old social system, thereby perhaps turning the final catastrophe into a gradual, step-by-step and as gentle a process of disintegration as possible."

This passage of Engels can be said to have summarized word for word the revisionist erroneous views that Bernstein later put forward in "Premises". And what is Engels' attitude towards Bernstein and his ilk?

Engels criticized sharply: "It is these people who, under the guise of being busy, not only do nothing themselves, but also try to prevent others from doing anything, except empty talk... It is these people who want to confine history within their narrow and mediocre vision, but history always ignores them and goes its own way."

It can be seen that Engels fundamentally opposes the revisionist views that advocate "reform", "gradual" and "moderation". This fully demonstrates that Engels is not the source of Bernstein's revisionism. On the contrary, Engels was already a severe critic of revisionism as early as 20 years ago when the latter initially put forward his revisionist views.

In summary, Engels did not make a fundamental change in the strategy of proletarian struggle in his later years. For Engels, legal parliamentary struggle and armed violent revolution are not the only and absolute ways of struggle. They all depend on the specific background of the times and the environment of struggle, and must be carried out according to the times and circumstances. Therefore, as one of Engels' important works in his later years, the "Introduction" embodies the spirit of starting from reality and determining the strategy of struggle according to the specific situation. It can be said to be a valuable legacy left by Engels to future generations. It reminds us that we cannot be dogmatic or arbitrary, but must seek truth from facts and proceed from reality.