**International: Interview with Gao Fang: Organizational Principle of First International Was Democracy Not Democratic Centralism; International Practiced Collectivism**

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**Reporter: Good morning, Prof. Gao! This year marks the 150th anniversary of the founding of the First International, the first international organization of the working class. Could you tell us about the history of the founding of the First International?**

**Gao Fang:** Yes. The full name of the First International is the International Workingmen's Association. It was founded in London on September 28, 1864 and dissolved in Philadelphia, USA on July 15, 1876, and existed for nearly 12 years. In its literature, it used to be called simply “the International” or “the Association”, but never called itself or was never called as the First International. It was only after the establishment of the **Second International** of the international working class in 1889 that, as far as I have been able to verify, it was from 1892 that Engels referred to the historical International Workingmen's Association as the “First International”.

**The First International was mainly an international workers' federation of the working class in Europe and America.**

Its activities can be divided into the early, middle and late stages, with the center of its activities in the early and middle stages mainly in Europe. The most significant event in the period of the First International was the success of the **Paris workers' revolution in 1871** under the cultivation of the spirit of the First International, which led to the establishment of the Paris Commune, the first working class regime in the world. After the failure of the Paris Commune, the revolutions in Europe were at a low ebb again, and the persecution of the First International was intensified in various European countries. In addition, the division caused by the anarchist faction of the First International made it difficult for International to continue to gain a foothold in Europe. In 1872, the First International wanted to avoid some risks arising from its opponents and moved its core leading organ, the General Council, from London to New York to continue to promote the international workers' movement. Its prestige was beginning to weaken in European countries. However, it was difficult for the General Council to do much when it was separated from Europe, which was the center of the international workers' movement. So by 1872 the First International entered the latter part of its activities, that is, the period of decline, and was finally forced to dissolve itself in 1876.

**Reporter: We know that the program and constitution of the First International were written by Marx. How did Marx draft the program and constitution of the First International?**

**Gao Fang:** The first and foremost task of the First International after its establishment was to formulate its program and articles and rules of association in order to unify the guiding ideology and organizational action of all its members. On October 5, 1864, the General Council elected 9 members out of its 55 members to form a special commission, or sub-commission, responsible for drafting the program and articles of association. Five of them were Englishmen, including Odger, Creamer and Weston, as well as the Frenchman Victor Le Lubez, the German Marx, the Italy contact man Major Wolff and the Polish Holtrop. What was submitted to the sub-commission on October 8, 1864, was a declaration of principles drafted by the Englishman Weston and the Rules of the Italian Workingmen’s Association translated into English by Major Wolff. Later Italian Working Men’s Association was admitted as member of the International Association on December 13, 184.

The former was extremely confusing and long-winded, while the latter turned the IWA into a loose association of mutual aid societies, instead of defining the International as a tightly knit organization with a revolutionary fighting mandate. The majority of the sub-commision was not satisfied with either of these documents. The Frenchman Victor Le Lubez then consolidated them into a draft document and submitted it to the Sub-Commission on October 15 for re-discussion and endorsement, and then sent it to the General Council for approval at its meeting on October 18, after which it was submitted to the General Council for approval. Previously, Marx had not attended the meeting of the sub-commission to take part in the discussion, either because of illness or because Marx was not informed of the meeting. It was only on this occasion, when he participated for the first time in the deliberations of the General Council, that Marx saw the draft submitted by Victor Le Lubez. The plenary session of the General Council on October 18 was quite lively, with many comments on the draft document, and Marx's skillful and tactful remarks were praised by all others. It was decided to send the document back to the sub-commision for revision. On October 20, the sub-commision met at Marx's home, and it was agreed that Marx would be asked to write the revisions. During the week from October 21 to 27, Marx wrote the Declaration of the International Workingmen's Association as the program document of the First International, replacing the “Declaration of Principles” that had preceded the original draft constitution. At the same time, the draft statutes were substantially revised as the Provisional Statutes of the Association.

On November 1, Marx read out in English the Declaration of the Establishment of the International Workingmen's Association and the Provisional Statutes of the Association, which Marx had carefully written, and the meeting unanimously adopted these two documents.

**Reporter: How to understand and grasp the spirit and essence of the program and constitution of the First International?**

**Gao Fang:** Let's look at the Declaration of the Establishment of the International Workingmen's Association (hereinafter referred to as the Declaration of the**Inauguration** of the Association), which is less than 7,000 words in length and is the program of the First International. A program is a concise document in which an organization analyzes the situation and sets out its goals and specific tasks. Program’s spirit and essence can be understood from the following three aspects:

Firstly, it appeared in the form of a message to the workers, sending out the strongest voice to the workers of the whole of Europe, revealing the catastrophe of the dark age of Europe after the failure of the 1848 revolution, and pointing out that the working class had made new progress in this era through tenacious struggles.

Secondly, it begins with an incisive summary and analysis of the characteristics of the era of 1848-1864 in Europe, the adversities faced by the workers of Europe at that time and mentions the two major achievements of the workers' movement. In today's language, the Manifesto of the Association is a classic document of Marx's efforts to innovate, nationalize and popularize Marxism.

Thirdly, the program put forward the fundamental tasks of the international workers' movement.

The program comprises six main points: the seizure of power has become the great mission of the working class; the seizure of power requires the support of the workers; and the seizure of power requires the support of the workers. The seizure of power requires the correct leadership of the workers' parties. The correct leadership of the workers' parties must be accompanied by the conscious action of the masses of workers. Workers of all countries cannot fight alone, but must have international unity and mutual support in order to win. After seizing power, the working class must follow scientific theories and adopt correct domestic policies. From this, we can realize that Marx aimed to build the IWA into an international workers' union as a political party.

**Let us look at the Common Statute of the IWA:** The Common Statute of the IWA, as finalized by Marx, consists of an introduction of nearly 400 words and thirteen articles.The introduction begins by stating that the great goal of the struggle for the emancipation of the working class is “not the struggle for class privileges and monopolies, but for equal rights and duties, and for the destruction of all class domination”; the struggle for freedom from “economic and social exclusion”; and the struggle for freedom from “economic and social exclusion”. The struggle for liberation from “economic domination by the monopolists of the means of labor, the source of life” means the realization of the working class's own domination of the means of labor.Here Marx actually made the realization of the social appropriation of the means of production, as advocated by the theories of communism and socialism, as the great goal of the First International.

It can be seen from the provisions of the statute that: the General Assembly of the workers of the association is the center of power and the highest authority of the association, and it holds annual meetings; the General Council is the leading body and executive organ of the association. The General Council is the leading and executive body of the Association, elected by the All-Association Workers' Congress and reporting on its work to the Congress; the basic branches and affiliated workers' groups have relative autonomy. The grass-roots branches and affiliated workers' organizations which have a relatively independent autonomy.

**From this we can see that the organizing principle of the First International was democracy, not democratic centralism.** We can't project the democratic centralism system practiced by the Soviet Communist Party later to the historical First International.

**Reporter: What were the main activities of the First International during its 12 years of existence?**

**Gao Fang:** The First International was the first international workers' organization of a political party nature, aiming at promoting the establishment of working-class political parties in all countries from the top down, leading the working class to seize power and realizing the liberation of the working class. The First International has been in existence for 12 years, has established branches in 18 countries, had about 1 million members, has held more than 400 meetings and adopted a series of resolutions. Its most important activities have been the holding of 9 major conferences, namely the Founding Congress and five congresses, as well as three delegates' meetings.

**The first congress was held in Geneva from September 3 to 8, 1866, with 60 delegates from Britain, France, Switzerland and Germany.**

Marx was too busy writing his “Das Kapital” to be present. So he didn’t participate. However, as a member of the Standing Commision of the General Council of the Association, Marx was entrusted with the task of drafting the “Instructions of the Provisional General Council to the Delegates”, which in fact set the general tone for the first Congress. The Congress first adopted the Provisional Statutes of the Association, which had been drawn up after the Founding Congress, and then added more detailed Organizational Regulations; the Provisional Statutes of the Association, which had been drawn up after the Founding Congress, and which were adopted by the Congress.

The election of the original General Council members to form the General Council and the authorization of the General Council to add a number of additional members to bring the number to 50. At the meeting of the General Council held on September 28th to consider the new leadership, Marx's efforts led to the abolition of the chairmanship, which helped to strengthen the collective leadership of the General Council.

**The Second Congress was held as scheduled in Lausanne, Switzerland, from September 2-8, 1867, with 71 delegates:** Marx declined to be a delegate to the General Council because Marx had to publish Volume 1 of Capital.The Congress adopted correct resolutions on the political struggle of the working class, affirming that the attainment of political freedom is the first and absolutely necessary condition for the social emancipation of the working class.The Congress also debated and adopted a resolution on the question of war and peace, recognizing that peace can only be ensured under a new social system free from class antagonisms and agreeing that the Association should send delegates to the forthcoming congress of the bourgeois Peace League.It was decided that the General Council would remain in London, thus facilitating Marx's continued role in it.

**The annual meeting of the Third Congress was held as scheduled from September 6-13, 1868 in Brussels, the capital of Belgium:** There were 99 delegates.The first volume of Marx's Capital had been published in September 1867, so Marx could have participated in the congress, but the General Council did not elect him as a delegate but entrusted him with the writing of the Third Annual Report of the General Council of the International Workingmen's Association (IWA).The third Congress once again defeated the Proudhonists on the issues of war and peace and ownership of the means of production, and adopted resolutions in accordance with the views expressed in the report of the General Council drafted by Marx.

**The Fourth Congress was held as scheduled in Basel, Switzerland, September 6-11, 1869, with 78 delegates**: For the first time the American Section sent one delegate to the Fourth Congress. The first three congresses of the First International were mainly concerned with the ideological controversy with the reformism of the French Proudhonists, and it can be said that most of the documents drafted by Marx for the General Council were adopted by the congresses. The Congress also decided to strengthen the powers of the General Council, which would henceforth be required to examine and approve applications for membership by workers' organizations in all countries and would be empowered to expel branches that did not comply with the Association's rules. This decision was of great practical significance in safeguarding the authority of the General Commision and consolidating the organization of the Association.

**The Fifth Congress was held from September 2 to 7, 1872 in The Hague, Netherlands:** 64 delegates attended.Marx was this time elected as a delegate of the General Council to the Congress, where he presented the “Report of the Fifth Annual Congress of the International Workingmen's Association” on behalf of the General Council.Engels attended this Congress as a delegate from Germany.The Congress upheld the central authority of the General Council in organizational matters and rejected the Bakuninists' attempt to use the General Commision only as a liaison or communication and statistical organ.On the question of the political activities of the proletariat, the Congress also rejected the Bakuninist attempts to deny the political struggle, and emphasized the need to build a proletarian party.Hague Congress in 1872 heard the report of the Special Commission on the divisive activities of the Bakuninist UDPS and decided to expel Bakunin and his follower Guillaume from the International Association. This marked the victory in the struggle against Bakunin's sectarian separatism.

**Reporter: What were the major achievements of the First International in the past 12 years?**

**Gao Fang:** The major achievements of the First International during its 12 years of activity can be summarized in the following four aspects. Firstly, it vigorously fought for the rights and interests of the working class. It actively supported the strikes of workers in various countries. The General Council issued a fervent appeal to workers in all countries for economic assistance to striking workers. The strikes of workers in various countries began with the demand for shorter working hours, which eventually led to the generalization of the **eight-hour working day.**

**Secondly, the struggle for workers' rights and interests also included the right to universal political suffrage.**

In May 1865, the “International” promoted the establishment of the National League for Electoral Reform by British workers. The electoral reform movement forced the Liberal British government to introduce a draft electoral law in March 1866 that lowered property restrictions and enabled some of the upper echelon of male workers to gain the right to vote. In March 1867, British Parliament was forced to pass a new Electoral Act that widened the electorate even more. It was not until 1918 that women were conditionally enfranchised (at least 30 years of age, with a university degree and an annual income of £5 pound or more in real estate). Secondly, International strongly supported the liberation struggles of oppressed peoples and national democratic movements. “The International was itself a product of workers' solidarity with the Polish national uprising of 1863.“ In accordance with Marx's correct proposition, the International held three consecutive public mass rallies to solemnly commemorate the first, second and third anniversaries of the Polish people uprising of 1863-1864. International also strongly supported the struggle of the Irish nation against British colonial rule. The multifaceted efforts and mass movements of the International played an important role. In the American Civil War, the First International strongly supported the war of the Northern Republicans against the Southern slave-owners, argued that it was in the interest of the democratic process and the workers' movement.

**Thirdly, International gave strong support to the Paris Commune revolution of 1871.**

“The founding declaration of the International stated loudly that “the seizure of power has become the great mission of the working class”. “It is only natural that the International, which has contributed to the only seizure of power during its existence - the Paris Commune of 1871 - should pay particular attention to it. The General Council met eleven times in London from March 14 to May 30 to follow closely the progress of the Paris Commune regime. Marx and Engels tried to unite the vast majority of the members and did their best to support the Paris Commune in every way. As early as March 28, the General Council meeting adopted Marx's proposal to publish a “Letter of the International Workers' Association to the People of Paris” to make clear the position and ideas of the International and entrusted Marx with the task of writing it. Because Marx had to wait for more information about the situation in Paris and because Marx was sick, Marx wrote three drafts of this important document. The first draft was completed around May 10, with more than 60,000 words; the second draft was completed in mid-May, with more than 60,000 words.

The second draft was completed in mid-May, with more than 30,000 words. After the failure of the Paris Commune on May 28th, the third draft was finalized on May 29th and unanimously adopted by the General Council after being read on May 30th, and was named The Civil War in France, which gave a systematic account and summary of the beginning and end of the revolution of the Paris Commune.

**Fourthly, International vigorously criticized all kinds of non-scientific socialism, and innovated and developed scientific socialism.**

From the very beginning of its establishment, the International consisted of the British Labor Unionists, the French Proudhonists, the German Lassalleans, and the Bakuninists who had joined it later. Most of these factions believed in reformist socialism; and the Bakuninists advocated far-left anarchism. The Bakuninists advocated anarchism of the extreme left, but they advocated the abolition of property inheritance as the starting point of socialist reforms, which was also a reformist move which denied political revolution. Marx and Engels, in the General Council of the International, and in all its meetings and congresses, were good at winning over and uniting the majority, and constantly criticized their fallacies of non-scientific socialism.

Most of the First International's congresses adopted, or mainly adopted, the ideas of Marx and Engels, which marked the victory of Marxism over these non-scientific schools of socialism. Meanwhile, through nearly a decade of practice of First International, Marx and Engels changed the scientific theory of communism to be expressed as "scientific socialism" since 1873-1874 in their writings. Because of the above major achievements in the four aspects of politics, organization, ideology and theory, it can be said that the First International has been a shining light in the history of the world socialist and communist movement for a long time.

**Reporter: How should we recognize the historical achievements and status of the First International today?**

**Gao Fang:** When the First International was first founded, there were many factions with different political ideologies, so it can be said that all the factions shared the same dream and had their own plans as to what kind of international organization the International should be. In the face of the complexity of such a multitude of factions and the diversity of false dreams, Marx tried his best to cope with the situation with wisdom, and, in spite of all the arguments and divisons, skillfully drafted two important documents, namely, the Declaration of the Establishment of the International Workingmen's Association and the Common Statute for the International Workingmen's Association. Marx was determined to make the IWA a party-based international organization of the working class.

First International also sought to promote the establishment of political parties by the working class in all countries in Europe, so that they can lead the working class and the masses to seize power, realize social transformation and achieve the emancipation of the working class and all mankind. Thanks to the unremitting efforts of Marx, Engels and many other sages, not only was the Social Democratic Labor Party (SDP) of Germany established in 1869, but also the first working-class regime, the Paris Commune, was set up in France in 1871. Although the International did not fully realize the purpose for which it was established, its historical achievements were still great.

As Engels said in the preface of the German edition of the Communist Manifesto in 1890: **And Marx was right. The working class of 1874, at the dissolution of the International, was altogether different from that of 1864, at its foundation. Proudhonism in the Latin countries, and the specific Lassalleanism in Germany, were dying out; and even the ten arch-conservative English trade unions were gradually approaching the point where, in 1887, the chairman of their Swansea Congress could say in their name: “Continental socialism has lost its terror for us.” Yet by 1887 continental socialism was almost exclusively accorded the theory written in the Manifesto.**

The dissolution of the International only showed that the preparation of the national working class parties by a party-based international workers' organization had fulfilled its historic mission. The Second International had inherited the unfinished business of the First International and continues to push forward the international socialist and communist movement under the new historical conditions. The historical position of the First International can be briefly summarized as follows: **I can say that** First International **was the bridge and engine between the first communist party in the world, the League of Communists, which was dissolved in 1852, and the Second International, which was founded in 1889.** This is what gave birth to a large number of working-class socialist parties in the world before and after the founding of the Second International. From the creation of an international communist party (the League of Communists), to the establishment of a party-based international workers' organization (the First International), to the establishment of socialist parties of the working class in various countries united as an international organization (in the Second International), these are generally the three stages of the exploration of the establishment of a working class political party by Marx and Engels in the 19th century. It was a tortuous, and a spiral process.

This shows how arduous it was to combine the theories of socialism and communism with practice and to develop the socialist and communist movement, a process of continuous exploration and advancement with the times. Concerning the historical significance of the First International, Lenin, in his article **“The Third International and Its Place in History”,** written for the first issue of the journal Communist International on April 15, 1919, at the beginning of the founding of the Third International, or the **Comintern,** made the following eloquent conclusion on the historical role of the First International: **“The First International laid the foundations of the international proletariat's struggle for socialism.“ “The First International (1864-72) laid the foundation of an international organisation of the workers for the preparation of their revolutionary attack on capital. The Second International (1889-1914) was an international organisation of the proletarian movement whose growth proceeded in breadth, at the cost of a temporary drop in the revolutionary level, a temporary strengthening of opportunism, which in the end led to the disgraceful collapse of this International”.** In my opinion, this is the political, ideological and theoretical foundation of scientific socialism, the foundation of its line, strategy and tactics, and the foundation of its beliefs, its spirit and its style.

**Reporter: For the ruling Marxist party, what profound practical inspiration can be gained from revisiting the history of the First International?**

**Gao Fang:** **In my opinion, there are two main points of practical significance for our Party:** **firstly, we should learn from the selfless spirit of dedication, free and democratic style and collective leadership of the pioneers and sages of the First International.** Many delegates and members of the First International made self-sacrifices and selfless sacrifices for the liberation of the working class and for the cause of socialism. Those who served as General Secretaries of International received only a very small subsistence allowance.

Sorge, a General Secretary of the International, not only did not receive any subsidy, but also lost his music teaching income. Delegates and members attended meetings in their spare time of their professions. Marx drafted hundreds of thousands of words for the First International without receiving any money. The General Secretary had no privileges, had only one vote on the commissions, equal to that of the other members, and was responsible for the written records of the meetings. In **the six years and ten months between October 1864 and August 1871**, the General Council met 393 times, basically once a week, mostly in the evenings during spare time of leaders. It is touching to read the four thick books of General Council meeting minutes. The Executive Chairman, who presided over the meetings, was elected at the regular weekly meetings.

In the absence of the General Secretary, someone else was chosen to be the clerk and to write the minutes. In the minutes, each speaker prefixed his or her surname with the word citizen, as in “Citizen Marx said………”. This shows that in a civil society, which in London at that time was of course a bourgeois civil society, everyone participated equally as a citizen in all kinds of public affairs. Marx and Engels spoke as members of the Council like everyone else, and there were often debates and controversies, and Marx often drew back from the views he advocated and made compromises. In the end, every member had an equal vote on major and even minor issues, and the record showed the result of the vote by a few votes.

No member had any higher personal authority at the meeting and no one was worshipped. This can be said to be an example and model of democracy and collective leadership within the working-class party. Marx's personal feeling was that any dictatorship in the General Council would come to an end.

**SECOND INSPİRATİON FOR THE CPC TODAY**

Secondly, we should learn from Marx's skill in the First International in combining the firmness and flexibility, principled approach and inclusiveness approach former scientific socialists like Marx and Engels, their skills in fighting for and uniting the majority, and in drawing wisdom from social practice and drawing wisdom from the majority of the masses, so as to keep abreast of the times and constantly move forward in the development of scientific socialism. When the First International was first established in 1864, it was dominated by the British Federation of Trade Unions (FTU), the French Proudhonites and the Italian Mazziniites, all of whom attempted to build the First International into an international workers' organization to achieve their respective goals.

In the General Council, Marx was the only one who was determined to turn the International into an international workers' organization of a political party nature and to promote the working class to realize the great mission of seizing political power and achieving the emancipation of the working class. At that time, Engels was far away from home, so Marx had to work alone, and with his unique insight, Marx drew up the Declaration of the Establishment of the IWA and the Common Statute of the IWA, which were unanimously adopted by the General Commission and ratified by the Congress.

**In today's world, there are still many schools of socialism, such as scientific socialism, democratic socialism, national socialism, eco-socialism, African socialism, Trotsky socialism and the list can be longer.** As a Marxist party we must guard against being a solo dancer, we should unite with all the members of the family of socialist movement, we should never act arrogantly.

We must have a broad mind, be good at inheriting and carrying forward the political wisdom, ideology, and theoretical knowledge of Marx during his time in the First International, and be good at striving for, uniting, and accommodating various different socialist schools of thought, so as to work tirelessly for the realization of the grand cause of gradually developing world capitalism into world socialism. During the period of the First International, Marx was also good at keeping in touch with the reality and touch with the masses, and developing scientific socialism theories in keeping with the times.

When Marx found that the scientific theory of communism was not easily accepted by the masses, whereas socialism had a broad social base, therefor Marx renamed his theory as scientific socialism, so as to make it easier for the masses to recognize the difference between scientific socialism and non-scientific socialism, and to make it easier for the masses to accept scientific socialism. When Marx realized that it was difficult to carry out violent revolutions after the widespread implementation of parliamentary democracy and universal suffrage, Marx timely put forward the idea that some capitalist countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands could make a peaceful transition to socialism. These reasonable ideas need to be realized by the sincere socialists of today with all their heart and wisdom, instead of passively waiting for the day when the crisis of capitalism is so deep that a violent world revolution will break out to sweep away world capitalism.