

Labor, Rights and Distribution in The Critique of the Gotha Program

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Abstract: “The Critique of the Gotha Program” is regarded as an important programmatic document of the entire international socialist movement, in which the analysis of labor theory and the relationship between “equal rights” and “fair distribution” The discussion still has important theoretical guiding value.

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Marx’s Critique of the Gotha Program, which fought against the opportunism prevailing in the German Socialist Workers’ Party at that time, has been regarded as an important programme of scientific communism and received continuous attention and attention since its publication. This paper will study Marx’s criticism of the “German Workers’ Party Program” and whether these criticisms still have guiding value under the background of the changing times.

1. Main content of “Critique of the Gotha Program”

“Critique of the Gotha Program” mainly includes two aspects: one is Marx’s criticism of the Gotha Program; the other is Engels’ criticism of the Gotha Program. Both parts were discussed by Marx and Engels in correspondence with Wilhelm Bekla, August Bebel, Karl Kautsky, and Friedrich Adolf Zogel.

First, the critique of the premise, that is, the critique of the premise, which is mainly reflected in Marx’s criticism of the discussion about labor in the draft program. Discussions on labor in the draft program. In Marx’s view, labor has natural constraints. In any society and culture, if laborers do not possess any means of labor and labor tools other than their own labor power, then these laborers are bound to make labor possible in order to obtain these. The means of labor and labor tools realized by the labor force have to become the slaves of the owners of other material conditions of labor, and these material owners of labor include landowners in addition to the capitalist class. Therefore, “labor is the source of all wealth and all culture” is correct only on the premise that labor has corresponding objects and materials. Moreover, only exchanged and circulated labor can create value and wealth, and these values and wealth do not belong to “all members of society” equally “outright”. Marx believed that before distributing these values and wealth, it is actually necessary to deduct the fixed and variable costs used in labor production, and deduct general management expenses, infrastructure construction expenses, social security expenses and other parts that cannot be calculated using the principle of fairness.

Second, principled critique, that is, a critique of principles. Marx’s principled criticism of the draft program is embodied in the criticism of the draft program about “fair distribution”, “iron wage law”, “free country” and “equal national education”. The draft program held that laborers demanded a fair distribution of labor income, but Marx believed that except for “labor income” which is an unacceptably vague term, distribution according to the principle of fairness is actually still the right of the bourgeoisie. Moreover, in Marx’s view, talking about fair distribution beyond the economic structure of the society and the social and cultural development restricted by it is essentially a principled fallacy, and it is just talking about the principle of fair distribution. Marx not only pointed out

that Lassalle made a wrong statement about the law of wages, but also pointed out that his more fundamental mistake was that Lassalle did not understand what wages are, but Following the bourgeois economists who regarded the appearance of things as the essence of affairs , they did not realize that the root of slavery lies in the wage labor system.

Third, practical criticism, that is, criticism of practice. Marx's practical criticism of the draft program is mainly reflected in Marx's criticism of "emancipation of the working class", "state assistance" and "as the spiritual and moral basis of the state". In the cause of the emancipation of the working class, the draft program listed all classes other than the proletariat as a "reactionary gang", while Marx believed that the bourgeoisie was a "reactionary gang" for the revolutionary proletariat, However, because some middle classes other than the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are about to transfer into the ranks of the proletariat, these middle classes should not be included in the "reactionary gang". In order to pave the way for the emancipation of the working class, the draft program proposes to "rely on state assistance to establish production cooperatives." Marx believed that the establishment of production cooperatives does not require state assistance. Production cooperatives "are established by the workers themselves and are neither protected by the government nor It has value only if it is protected by the bourgeoisie." As for the practical provisions in the draft program on the maintenance of state operations, such as the daily working day, women and children's labor, and prison labor, Marx also believed that these practical provisions were too vague and criticized them one by one.

2. The historical value of "Critique of the Gotha Program"

After Engels published Marx's criticism of the "Programme of the German Workers' Party" and Marx's letter to Wilhelm Bekla on May 5, 1875, although the German Social Democratic Congress Party at that time and the Central Organ of the Social Democratic Party "The editorial board of the Forward newspaper received a lukewarm response to it, but, "As Engels foreseen, this work of Marx was welcomed both in the German party and among the socialists in other countries, and the societies of other countries were very popular. Communists regard this work as a programmatic document for the entire international socialist movement" ¹. Just as Engels hoped to achieve when he published Marx's Critique of the Gotha Program, the Critique of the Gotha Program became the most important programmatic document of scientific communism. Marx's Criticism of the Gotha Program not only clarified the positions of Marx and Engels , which showed a critical attitude towards the "Programme of the German Workers' Party", and was also regarded as "a model of uncompromising struggle against opportunism".

On the one hand, what still has theoretical guiding significance in the Gotha Program lies in the self-criticism of the party. Marx's criticism of the Gotha Program is actually a self-criticism of the party. Whether it was the Eisenach Party or the German Socialist Workers Party formed by the Eisenach Party and the Lassalle faction, Marx and Engels always paid great attention to it. Bucknecht, Hasselmann and others had differences and controversies in their positions and opinions, but Marx and Engels never regarded themselves as "outsiders". Engels wrote to Karl Kautsky on February 3, 1891: "See how we criticize ourselves, we are the only party capable of doing so" . In Engels' view, both the criticism of the Gotha Program written by Marx and his own criticism of the draft program were actually a kind of self-criticism of the party. Engels went on to emphasize in a letter to Karl Kautsky on February 23: "This ruthless self-criticism has caused great consternation in the enemy...Where is another party that would dare to do so?" Marx wrote One of the important intentions of the criticism of the Gotha Program and Engels' publication of it was to eliminate the persistent influence of Lassalleism in the party at that time, and to carry out a comprehensive review of the word dogmatism, principle dogmatism, and practical dogmatism brought about by Lassalleism. Profound criticism in order to maintain the party's advanced nature and correct the party's wrong direction. Although this kind of self-criticism of the party will cause dissatisfaction among some people in the party, and may also provide weapons for the enemy to attack, the construction of the party's advanced nature should not always maintain a respectful attitude towards the party because of these concerns. The party's self-criticism itself is one of the important symbols of the party's advanced nature. The advanced nature of a political party is not only reflected in its ability to withstand attacks from rival parties, but also in its courage and self-confidence to criticize itself. This courage and spirit of self-criticism is the living soul of Marx and Engels's program criticism.

On the other hand, what still has theoretical guiding significance in the Gotha Program is that it put forward many far-reaching propositions and ideas. For example, Marx discussed the relationship between "equal rights" and "fair distribution" in it. In the Criticism of the Gotha Program, Marx proposed that "equality consists in measuring with the same scale—labour. But... this equal right is an unequal right to different kinds of labor. It does not recognize any class distinctions ...it acquiesces in the unequal individual endowments of the laborers...in its content it is, like all rights, an unequal right" . Marx believed that such a view—that all people are treated equally as "workers" and that all people "equally enjoy rights"—actually conceals, recognizes or accepts the fact that there are class differences, and puts actual At the same time, such a so-called "equal rights view" also regards unequal personal talents and

unequal innate income (such as intelligence, family birth, etc.) up. In Marx's view, accepting such an "equal conception of power" will inevitably lead to unfair distribution, that is, "under the condition of providing the same labor and thus receiving the same share from the social consumption fund, a certain individual If you get more than another person, you will be richer than another person . " In fact, Marx put forward the "distributive fairness paradox of equal rights", that is, the substantive inequality caused by the distribution of equal rights. Based on this, Marx believed that in order to avoid unfair distribution, "rights should not be equal, but unequal . " Marx was neither the first nor the last to discuss equal rights and distributive justice. After Marx, Rawls's "A Theory of Justice" and Piketty's "Capital in the 21st Century" both discussed "equal rights" and "fair distribution" with epochal significance. "Equal rights" and "fair distribution" are eternal topics that have been continuously discussed in political theory and practice, but there are still no satisfactory answers. Marx's discussion on "equal rights" and "fair distribution" in the criticism of the Gotha Program is not only of great significance for understanding Marx's concept of rights and distribution, but also of "equal rights". It is a useful exploration of the eternal topic of "equitable distribution". Moreover, this discussion also led to a continuous debate on this topic by a large number of Marxists and critics of Marxism.

3. Conclusion

It can be seen that there are many fallacies in the draft program, just as Marx criticized it, but this does not mean that all Marx's criticisms of it are reasonable, let alone that all Marx's arguments are grounded and correct. To admit and accept it without criticism is undoubtedly dogmatic, which is far away from the critical spirit of Marx's Critique of the Gotha Programme.

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