

Marx's Critique of the Gotha Program

THE manuscript published herewith—the accompanying letter to Bracke as well as the criticism of the proposed platform—was sent in 1875, shortly before the Gotha fusion congress, to Bracke, to be further communicated to Geib, Auer, Bebel, and Liebknecht, and later on to be returned to Marx. Since the Halle convention put the discussion of the Gotha program on the party's order of business, I would consider myself guilty of wrongful suppression were I still longer to withhold from the public this important document—perhaps the most important document bearing on this discussion.

But the manuscript has also another, and still more far-reaching significance. Here, for the first time, is clearly and definitely set forth the attitude of Marx on the course followed by Lassalle since his entrance upon the agitation, both in relation to Lassalle's economic principles and to his tactics.

The relentless vigor with which the proposed platform is analyzed, the inexorableness with which the results arrived at are pronounced and the weak points of the platform exposed—all this can no longer offend now, after fifteen years. Specific Lassalleans exist nowadays only in foreign parts, like isolated ruins, and the Gotha platform was given up in Halle by its own makers as altogether inadequate.

Nevertheless, wherever it was not essential to the subject, I have omitted some severe expressions and opinions concerning some individuals, and indicated the omissions by asterisks. Marx himself would have done so had he published the manuscript now. The occasional vehemence of his language was provoked by two circumstances. In the first place, Marx and I were more intimately connected with the German movement than with any other; hence the decidedly backward step evidenced in this platform was particularly calculated to excite us. But in the second place, we were then, hardly two years after the Congress of the International at the Hague, involved in a most severe conflict with Bakunin and his Anarchists, who held us responsible for everything that transpired in the Labor Movement of Germany; we therefore had to expect that the secret fatherhood of this platform would also be ascribed to us. These considerations have passed away, and with them has passed the necessity for the passages in question.

Likewise some passages are merely indicated by asterisks, owing to considerations having to do with the press laws. Where a milder expression had to be chosen it is enclosed in brackets. Otherwise, the publication is faithful to the letter.

FREDERICK ENGELS.

London, January 6, 1891.

MARX'S LETTER TO BRACKE
London, May 5, 1875.

Dear Bracke:

After reading them you will be so kind as to communicate to Geib, Auer, Bebel and Liebknecht, the subjoined critical comments on the fusion platform. I am over-worked and compelled to work beyond the limits prescribed by my physician. It was therefore by no means a "pleasure" for me to write such a tape-worm. But it was necessary, so that the party friends, for whom this communication is intended, may not misinterpret the steps to be taken by me later on

It is indispensable, since outside of Germany the notion—altogether erroneous, but fostered by the enemies of our party—is entertained that we secretly from here direct the movement of the so-called Eisenach party. For instance, in a recent Russian publication, Bakunin makes me . . . responsible for all the platform declarations, etc., of that party

Aside from this it is my duty not to recognize, even by a diplomatic silence, a platform that is in my opinion altogether objectionable and demoralizing to the party.

Every real advance step of the movement is more important than a dozen platforms. If therefore, it was impossible—and the circumstances of the time did not permit it—to advance beyond the Eisenach platform, then you should have simply concluded an agreement for action against the common enemy. But when you formulate platforms of principles (instead of postponing this work until such time as you have become prepared for it through continued common action), then you establish landmarks by which all the world gauge the height of the party movement. The chiefs of the Lassalleans came to you because the conditions forced them. Had you declared to them from the outset that you would not enter on any dickering in principles, then they would have been obliged to content themselves with a program for action, or a plan of organization for common action. Instead of this, you allow them to come armed with credentials as binding: and surrender at discretion to those To cap the climax, they

gress, while our own party holds its convention *post festum* Everybody knows how pleased the workingmen are with the bare fact of a union, but you are mistaken if you believe that this momentary success is not bought too dearly.

Besides the platform is good for nothing, even irrespective of the canonization of the Lassallean articles of faith

With best greetings,

Yours,
KARL MARX.

COMMENTS ON THE PLATFORM OF THE GERMAN LABOR PARTY

I.

1. Labor is the source of all wealth and of all civilization, and since useful labor is possible only in and through society, the proceeds (Ertrag) of labor belong, unabridged and in equal right, to all the members of society.

First part of the paragraph: "Labor is the source of all wealth and of all civilization."

Labor is not the source of all wealth. Nature is just as much the source of use-values (and these certainly form the material elements of wealth) as labor, which is itself only the expression of a natural force, human labor-power. The above phrase is to be found in every child's primer and is correct in so far as it is assumed that labor starts out equipped with the requisite materials and means.

But a Socialist platform should not let such middle class phrases pass, and permit, by silence, the conditions that alone give sense thereto to be suppressed. And in so far as man stands toward Nature—the first source of all the means and objects of labor—in the relation of proprietor, in so far as he treats Nature as belonging to him, his labor becomes the source of use-values, hence also of wealth. The capitalists have very good reasons for imputing to labor supernatural creative powers, because from the nature-imposed necessity of labor it follows that the man who possesses no property but his labor power must, under all conditions of society and civilization, be the slave of those other men who have made themselves the possessors of the material conditions for labor. He can work only with their permission, hence live only with their permission.

But let us take the sentence as it runs, or rather limps. What should we have expected as the conclusion? Plainly this:

"Since labor is the source of all wealth, no one in society can acquire wealth except as the product of labor. Therefore, if he does not work himself,

he lives upon the labor of others, and also acquires his share of civilization at the expense of others' labor."

Instead of this, another sentence is attached by means of the phrase "and since," in order to draw a conclusion from this latter sentence, and not from the former.

Second part of the paragraph: Useful labor is possible only in and through society."

According to the first proposition labor was the source of all wealth and civilization; hence no society was possible without labor. Now we learn, on the contrary, that no "useful" labor is possible without society.

It would have been as sensible to say that only in society can useless and even publicly injurious labor become a branch of industry, that only in society can men live in idleness, etc., etc.—in short, to copy the whole of Rousseau.

And what is "useful" labor? Plainly, only the labor that produces the desired serviceable effect. A savage—a man is a savage after he has ceased to be an ape—a savage who kills an animal with a stone, who gathers fruits, etc., does "useful labor."

Thirdly, the conclusion: "And since useful labor is possible only in and through society—the proceeds of labor belong unabridged, in equal right, to all the members of society."

A beautiful conclusion! If useful labor is possible only in and through society, then the proceeds of labor belong to society—and the individual laborer receives only so much as is not necessary for the maintenance of the "pre-requisite" of labor—society.

Indeed this has been the regular claim made by the champions of each succeeding social system. First come the claims of the government and all that hangs thereby, since it is the social organ for the maintenance of the social order; next come the claims of the various sorts of private property, for the various sorts of private property are the foundations of society, etc. It is plain, such hollow phrase can be turned and twisted at will.

The first and the second part of the paragraph can have any sensible connection only in the following form:

"Labor can become the source of wealth and civilization only as social labor," or, what amounts to the same thing, "only in and through society."

This proposition is indisputably correct, for even if isolated labor (its material pre-requisites presupposed) can create use-values, yet it can produce neither wealth nor civilization.

And just as indisputable is this other statement: "In measure that labor is developed socially, and thereby becomes the source of wealth and civilization, are developed also poverty and degradation on the side of the laborer, wealth and civilization on the side of the non-laborer."

This is the law of all history up till now. Therefore, instead of talking in general terms about "labor" and "society," it should have been clearly pointed out how, under present capitalist society, the conditions, material and otherwise, are at last produced, which enable, and indeed compel, the laborers to break through that social curse.

But, in fact, the entire paragraph—faulty both in style and contents—appears here only in order to inscribe the Lassallean catchword of the "unabridged proceeds of labor" as the watchword on the flag of the party. I shall come back later to the "proceeds of labor," the "equal right," etc., as the same thing recurs in somewhat different form. (To be continued.)

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