

# How to Review the Revisionism and the Reformism of the Second International?

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The French scholars talked about the October Revolution led by Lenin just now, it is one type of socialist revolution, is there any other alternative? Now I want to go on with the talk about some issues concerning the 2<sup>nd</sup> International, which involves an alternative of socialist revolution and how to review the revisionism and the reformism.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> International once were forbidden to study for Chinese scholars for a long time, it couldn't be treated as one part of the intellectual history of Marxism. Under the influence of the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, the 2<sup>nd</sup> International was regarded as “a social democratic party of West-Europe type, which was born in an internal peaceful time, led by opportunist and dreamed of social reform but feared social revolution, while the Bolshevik Party was “a new type of party, a party of Marxism-Lenism, which advocated social revolution and could train the proletariat to combat bourgeoisie and carry the proletariat revolution into victory.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, the context of intellectual history was abducted by that of ideology.

From the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, as regard to Marxism, China's attitude went through affirmation to negation, reconsideration and research. From the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century to the end of 1940s, in the process of Marxism transmitted through China, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Clara Zetkin, August Bebel, Paul Lafargue, Plekhanov and their works got introduced into China and produced some positive influence. In this sense, it can be said that Chinese were positive toward the Marxism of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International.

In the 1950s, strongly influenced by the academic circle of the Soviet Union, China's attitude toward the Marxism of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International became completely negative, its study was also forbidden. Despite of this, there was still sporadic sorting out and translating of related works and materials, but most of them were published as restricted materials, only a few got published publicly, but they were still labeled as “for critical use” or annotated with critical remarks.

In the 1980s, pushed by Ideological liberation movement, the academic circle also begun to

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<sup>1</sup> 《联共（布）党史简明教程》，人民出版社1975年版，第388页。（*The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolshevik) concise course*, people's Publishing House, 1975, p. 388）

review Marxism of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International from academic perspective, they published some research works which started from some specific problems or circles around some important figures like Bernstein and Kautsky. But whether in the amounts or influence, they are obviously weaker than the study on Marx ' s thoughts and Western Marxism.

The reasons for this are not that the Marxism of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International does not deserve study, but because its guiding ideology is revisionism and reformism opposite to Marxism. We should say that early in the struggle led by Lenin against the 2<sup>nd</sup> International opportunism, such an ideological context already formed. But only after the 3<sup>rd</sup> International was founded , the context got universally accepted and took some effects on other parties, and then later got expressed in the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*. Furthermore, based on the ideological antagonism, Marxism-Leninism was judged as suitable for history progress, while the 2<sup>nd</sup> International opportunists were considered to be pulling the theory backward and turning one of its principles into a dogma. In such judgments, the ideological conflicts were premise and base, they decide whether the theory was right and wrong. Just because of this, when Soviet Union criticized the peaceful road with the ideas of revolution and war of the 3<sup>rd</sup> International, the theory of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International was rebuked as revisionism and opportunism, idealism, mechanic materialism and vulgar materialism, etc.

Besides this, the founders of Western Marxism like Antonio Gramsci, Karl Korsch, and George Lukacs also created a slightly ideological context. These few all were Marxist theoreticians of the 3<sup>rd</sup> International. Ideologically, they all favored the ideas of revolution and war of the 3<sup>rd</sup> International, advocated socialist revolution and opposed the ideas of peace of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International; theoretically they criticized the political views with Lenin's revolution theory. But they didn't advocate a complete denial of the Marxist theory of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International, instead, they worked hard to uncover its valuable ideas. For example, Korsch definitely considered Franz Mehring and Rosa Luxemburg as the forerunner of western Marxism, and took the Soviet way as a Bolshevik movement of ideology; and Gramsci praised Antonio Labriola for "turning a general interpretation of history into a general philosophy"<sup>2</sup> and thus opened a new direction for the development of practical philosophy.

We can say that such digging in the Marxism of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International opened a gap in the strong ideological context of Soviet Union. Despite of this, people only could see value in individual Marxist theory of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International, but couldn't see the value of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International as a whole and study it as a form of theory in the intellectual history of Marxism.

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<sup>2</sup> A.葛兰西：《狱中札记》，中国社会科学出版社2000年版，第302-303页。（A. Gramsci : Prison notes, Social Science Press of China, 2000, pp. 302-303）

Those who truly studied Marxism of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International as part of the intellectual history are Leszek Kolakowski and Predrag Vranicki. They not only used the concept of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International in their works of history of Marxism, but also called it as the golden age of Marxism, devoted a lot of papers to narrating the intellectual struggle and thoughts of the representative figures and their contributions in developing the theory of scientific socialism and creating the theory of imperialism. In their views, Marx's theories got universally accepted in the period of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International and further developed in the violent theoretical debates.

As for me, though the 2<sup>nd</sup> International took Marx' and Engels' theory as its theoretical starting point , it's absolutely not the replica of classical writers, it saw the new capitalist changes of western Europe and new developments of labor movement from the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century and put forward questions which were meaningful to the time. These criticism and creation formed the dividing line between the 2nd International and the time of Marx and Engels, they enabled us to reflect on the western-Europe background of revisionism and the meaning of their existence, we need to analyze the theoretical controversy of the 2nd International from the level of epistemology, uncover its characteristics of western Europe and time, its methodological principle of historicism, find the intrinsic mechanism for Marxism to change and solve the puzzle of conflict between Eastern and Western Marxism which haven't been solved for a long time. Meanwhile, we need to think about the theoretical structure of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International and its contributions in historical materialism, thus opening a new perspective for Marxism theory study and creating a new situation for the development of Marxism.

We know that after Engels passing away, Bernstein, having seen the capitalist development in western Europe, thought that modern capitalist development has built up a modern credit system, a perfect communication system and organizations of industrialists which showed that capitalist system had generated new functions and could adapt to the development of productive forces, overcome its own crisis and generate more and more socialist elements, so Marx's predictions about the collapse of capitalism and principles of proletarian revolution didn't apply any more, and the proletarian can carry out socialism through labor union and social reform.

The facts of later development have shown that his views are not senseless. The problem is that he went beyond the limited criticism in subsequent polemic and doubted the philosophical system of Marxism, so he is wrong in that way.

And concerning the road of the Proletarian revolution, considering the huge success the SPD made in parliament election, Bernstein thought in developed countries with sound parliamentary democracy, the proletarian could "grow into socialism peacefully" through universal suffrage and parliamentary system. As for whether such revisionism is right or wrong, we could pass without

giving an answer, for the history hasn't proven what the socialist revolution road in developed capitalist country should be. But just from the fact that he could view Marxism from the perspective of historical developmental and put forward new viewpoints, he deserves a rediscovering.

This idea of growing into socialism peacefully ignited vigorous debates inside the 2<sup>nd</sup> International. Regarding the debates, previously we focused on criticizing the mistakes of Bernstein and seldom reflected on the Western-Europe background of Bernstein phenomenon and the meaning of his viewpoints. In fact, in the intellectual history, the reason that a theoretician could attract a lasting attention and caused lasting arguments does not lie in that he drew a valuable conclusion but because he proposed a valuable idea concerning the time.

In fact, the meaning of idea put forward by Bernstein lies in two aspects. Firstly, he put forward the question of how socialism should be realized in developed capitalist society, secondly, he framed the realization of socialism inside the Bourgeois democracy and freedom of western Europe, thus another question arose, that is, in developed capitalist society, what kind of ideas should socialism adopt, the democracy and freedom ideas of Bourgeois or Marx? If the latter, then under the new historical conditions, what contents and characteristics should it have? It's not hard to see that the most important theoretical controversies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International all originated in the capitalism development of western Europe and the corresponding ideas of capitalist democracy and freedom, so they inevitably have obvious characteristics of western Europe.

From the perspective of Marxist theoretical development, Bernstein's revision of Marx's theory is also a questioning about its relevance to the times. This questioning rightly gave new meaning to the intrinsic controversy of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International and formed a new beginning for the theoretical creation of Marxism. Out of the need to argue for his view of growing into socialism peacefully, Bernstein divided the historical materialism into two stages, the former stressed the principle that the economic basis determines superstructure, the inevitability of historic laws and the violent revolution of socialism, in this stage, the historical materialism was immature. While the latter stressed morality, right, ideology, in this stage, the historical materialism was mature. According to this, historical materialism should develop its mature form while discarding the immature characteristics among which the important one is the impurities of Hegel's dialectics. Meantime, Bernstein even referred to the narrative Engels wrote in 1895 on legal struggle in the introduction of Marx's, *The Class Struggles in France*, to argue for his reformist views.

As for legal struggle and peaceful transition, the views of classical Marxist writers are well known, just because Bernstein and some others were infatuated with capitalist democracy and parliamentary road and opposed violent revolution, people universally criticized the theory of peaceful transition as revisionism. In the 100 years after October Revolution, the word

“revisionism” got used continually and generally, it was applied to the cases in which the old formula and individual principle were made more complete, which revised or amended the outdated parts of classical theory and replaced them with new conclusions suitable for the situation of individual countries. All those who oppose “the interpretation, the center, the model” were considered betrayal of classics. The facts have shown that after the WWII, the international criticism of Yugoslavian revisionism, the Soviet Union revisionism or some other revisionism were all inappropriate. As for China, from avoiding the emergence of revisionism to fighting against revisionism, many serious problems arose, such actions not only didn’t defend Marxism, but also harm the development of Marxism and St movement. This is a bitter lesson.

The development of history has shown that there are great differences in the class structure, political system, the cultural background, national tradition, social psychology and life style of the East and the West. Based on the differences, Lenin stated that in democracy, dictatorship and socialist transformation, each nation should have its own characteristic. Lenin always explored the proletarian revolutionary road from the political and economic characteristics of Russia and oriental countries in the context of imperialist war, while Bernstein and some others always thought about socialist transition from the perspective of the political and economic characteristics of western countries in the peaceful time. The facts have proven that, Lenin’s theory was applicable to oriental countries, but the success of October Revolution as a violent revolution does not prove that all proletarian revolution should go through violence. It’s noteworthy that Lenin didn’t rule out the possibility of peaceful transition in parliamentary states, this is in line with Bernstein’s envisioning. Though whether this road will work still needs further verification, it is obviously unscientific to judge whether a party is Marxist or Revisionist based on its opinion on the road to socialism and should be discarded.

How to judge revisionism is always an unavoidable question in the history of Marxism and socialist theory. In 2005, a Russian academician of Russian Academy of Sciences, Osyelman, published a work called *In Defense of Revisionism*, in the work he demonstrated the dogmatization process of Marxism in former Soviet Union and claimed that we should “give historical justice to Bernsteinism”, thus sparked a lot of arguments and reactions in Russian intellectual circles. Russian journal *Philosophical Problem* even held a seminar taken part in by the senior researchers in Russian Academic circles. In their views, revisionism should be considered as a way to carry on scientific criticism, oppose dogmatism and examine scholarly principles, it shows a degree of openness and creation inside the academic tradition.

In fact, the development of a scientific theory can’t go without revising, revision is a reinterpretation of Marxism according to specific, historic, contemporary and future capitalist

changes. Therefore, such revision is not a denial of the whole theory, but an adjustment of those Marx's principles which have become unsuitable for contemporary reality and become dogmatic. If we consider Marxism as an Ideology, then Marxist views will be worshipped as a canon of classic, all intention to examine it will be considered as attack on religious symbol and unacceptable. In their views, Marxism cannot hold monopoly over the truth, in the words of Karl Popper, no theory is supreme, so never attempt to propose an ultimate truth. Thus, if only revision is to add to the liberating force of Marxism, and doesn't change the aspiration for building a society which is free and equal for everyone, then such revision not only doesn't refute Marx, but also defends for it in a special way.

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