

Study of the Labor Movement under The Condition of the Working Class in England, from Personal Observations and Authentic Source

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Abstract. The Condition of the Working Class in England, from Personal Observations and Authentic Sources is the early work of Friedrich Engels to explore a new world outlook. It is not only a key for later generations to understand the tragic situation of the British working class, but also a sign that Engels began to understand the historical mission and historical task of the proletariat from the perspective of historical materialism. In his book, The Condition of the Working Class in England, from Personal Observations and Authentic Sources, Engels drew an important conclusion that the proletariat must struggle, and then systematically expound the basic ideas of "why is it possible", "why is it necessary", "why is it established" and "how to realize" of the British working class movement, and profoundly reveal the economic roots, institutional causes and struggle of the working class movement through analyzing the close relationship between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. It deeply reveals the economic root, institutional reason, struggle consciousness and realistic way of the workers' movement, and points out the way for the complete liberation of the working class.

Keywords: Engels, worker status, new world view.

1. Introduction

Engels's book The Condition of the Working Class in England, from Personal Observations and Authentic Sources is a precious document describing the miserable living conditions of the proletariat, which is of great significance in the history of the proletarian movement. Britain became the cradle of all labor movements, at the industrial center of the time. The rapid development of the productive forces is accompanied by the increasing poverty of the working class. All social relations of the proletariat are quietly changing. The sole purpose of the bourgeoisie is to make a fortune by selling the products of the workers, and social contradictions become very acute and complex. Unlike Germany theorists, here, we are from the perspective of the relationship between the reality of "why is it possible", "why is it necessary", "why is it established" and "how to realize", trying to clarify the possibility of British workers movement at that time, such key problems as the necessity, feasibility, for socialist theory and historical materialism to lay the solid objective basis.

2. Why the Workers' Movement was Possible: The development of the Industrial Revolution

In the 1860s, with the invention and use of steam engine, the Industrial Revolution of world historical significance began. Once the impetus of industry comes into being, it quickly involves everything in this maelstrom, vigorously promotes the reform of the whole civil society, and innovates all the existing modes of production. It has created a proletariat ignorant of this powerful human movement, forcing them to abandon their isolated lives and choose unconditionally a life of slavery under the control of machines. Workers are not satisfied with this kind of mechanical and hard life without independent activities. They want to get the right and dignity to think, work and live like human beings. An unstop able Labor Movement was about to break out.

Engels deeply analyzed the far-reaching impact of the Industrial Revolution, pointing out that production and reproduction are the foundation of social and historical development. First, the

development of technology accelerates the process of Industrial Revolution. The way of production changed drastically in the major sectors of Britain with the handworks replaced by large machine industries, and the transformation of production tools greatly improved the efficiency of producing goods. As mechanical engines replaced human generators, manual labor was excluded from social production, and the widespread introduction and use of machines in various sectors brought great liberation to capitalists' productivity. Cotton and flax textile industry, wool and silk processing industry, mining, agriculture and transportation industry, etc have been made remarkable achievements that many cities from a remote, sparsely populated small city have become an enormous industry and huge population of metropolis, hardworking people here every day with machines have close relations, as if workers left the machine and became nothing. Similarly, the machine indirectly becomes the main body in the workers, and cannot leave the company of workers for a moment. It can be said that "the industrial revolution was to Britain what the political revolution was to France and the philosophical revolution was to Germany"[1].

Second, the Industrial Revolution was a profound revolution in social relations. The advance of the Industrial Revolution and the innovation in production tools caused the reform of the British civil society and the adjustment of the social structure, and at the same time created its opposite for the bourgeoisie -- the industrial proletariat and the agricultural proletariat. Engels believed that the most important product of the British Industrial Revolution was the birth of the proletariat. The application of the spinning Jenny drove out manual labor and destroyed the quiet, rigid way of life of the agricultural weavers and small yeomanry, forcing them to become completely subordinated to the machine. The worker system also excludes manual labor in many aspects, aggravating the suffering of workers and damaging their health. Then the working proletariat and the agricultural proletariat grew rapidly, the proletariat lost all property and became completely destitute, and then there began political unrest and all the unpleasant facts that so disgusted the rulers.

Engels believed that industrial development was the basis for the change of social relations and the combination of social class differentiation. Industry determined the emergence, status, development and mission of the proletariat. He emphasized that the working class was the most revolutionary because of its poor life. By analyzing the development of industrial revolution and its consequences, Engels came to the conclusion that the development of material productivity determined the course of social history. On the one hand, the Industrial Revolution was the economic cause of worker alienation and the birth of the proletariat. On the other hand, the advancement of the Industrial Revolution has laid a solid material foundation for the workers' movement, and at the same time made the capitalist system and its mode of production the essential source of the workers' movement, increasingly appear.

3. Why the Workers' Movement is Necessary: the Defects of the Capitalist System Itself

Engels gained a new understanding of the decisive significance of material production in the process of deeply analyzing the development of productive forces and its influence. Engels believed that the Industrial Revolution gave birth to the proletariat and changed all social relations. The solution to the miserable condition of workers should be traced back to capitalism itself.

With the development of capitalist relations of production, cyclical economic crises occur frequently in capitalist society. The direct consequence of the economic crisis is to make the proletariat in distress, which leads to the rising voice of the proletariat against the capitalist system. First, capitalist society pursues the social system of exploiting and oppressing surplus labor. In the employment relationship of the capitalist factory, the worker has nothing but his own labor. In order to survive, workers must sell what little labor they have to capitalists. And in the working hours specified by the capitalist, the worker has to do the part of the work that the capitalist pays him for the value of the labor force. But the workers often finish this part of the labor ahead of time, and the exploitation of the capitalist begins. Driven by extreme egoism and for the purpose of obtaining more

surplus value, capitalists try their best to deprive workers of labor by extending working hours and increasing labor intensity, so as to maintain the production of surplus value. This means of pursuing surplus value is undoubtedly the main culprit that leads to the confrontation between the bourgeoisie, which has abundant means of production and consumption, and the proletariat, which has nothing but labor. Under the squeeze of capitalists, the majority of working class life miserable, increasingly become no thought, no spirit of the "inhuman", thus exacerbating the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. In "social warfare" competition was the basis of bourgeois rule. Competition pervasive lies between different classes and the inside of the same class, as Engels said, "the most fully reflected the popular competition in the modern civil society all people object to all people's war"[2], it is "built on due to the opposition of some workers and some workers on the division of the proletariat"[3]. Under the protection of the state, the bourgeoisie unscrupulous controls the means of production, means of living and the power of life and death of the proletariat, and the proletariat is reduced to the bourgeoisie's vassal and slave, and even become "redundant people" and "industrial reserve army" due to competition. Therefore, the "smart" bourgeoisie takes the fierce competition among the proletariat as the sharpest and most powerful weapon to control the proletariat.

Secondly, the contradictory movement of capitalist society is the root of periodic economic crisis. Under the shadow of capitalist production relations, productive forces change from socialized productive forces to capital productive forces, whose main purpose is to grab more surplus value by squeezing workers and pursue value appreciation to the maximum extent. With the brief prosperity of capitalist economy, the contradiction between socialization of production and private ownership of means of production, which is unique to capitalist society, has arisen. As long as this contradiction exists, the economic crisis will "follow us wherever we go", and it will take on a cyclical feature with the stage of the basic contradiction movement. Capitalist society on the arrival of the economic crisis is accompanied with factory product production loss and excess, a large number of business failures and a large number of unemployed workers hit, "all the crisis in reality is always the ultimate reasons: poor masses and the masses of consumption is limited"[4], the low quality of life of the proletariat and miserable life fully demonstrate the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie and irresponsible.

It can be seen that the capitalist system is based on exploitation. Capital never stops pursuing surplus value and exploits employed labor force with pleasure. The egoism nature of the bourgeoisie brings great suffering to the proletariat and intensifies the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. In addition, bourgeois rule is built on competition, in this kind of high-pressure exploitation and slavery, the vigorous rise of the workers' movement is inevitable, the awakening of proletarian struggle consciousness also has internal inevitability.

4. Why the Workers' Movement was Founded: the Awakening of Struggle Consciousness

In *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, from Personal Observations and Authentic Source, Engels pointed out that the Industrial Revolution brought passive mechanical life to the masses of workers with its most uncharitable side, and put heavy shackles on the workers, so that they could not think, live and study like real people. Although the means of the bourgeoisie to cover up the disaster of the workers have been improved, it is still difficult to cover up the poor situation of the material life of the majority of workers in terms of clothing, food, housing and transportation. As long as the working class is willing to wake up, it is like an army in a bourgeois camp.

The working class, free and dispossessed, is more stressful to the bourgeoisie than to those who still have bread. Through the facts Engels observed, heard and investigated about the situation of the working class, he comprehensively introduced the situation of the cruel exploitation and oppression of the working class, and described the oppressed and exploited miserable working class in real and detailed way. He called the proletariat's awakening as "one of the greatest and most fruitful events of the end of the century.[5]" First, workers are in an "inhuman" state, unable to live a normal life. In

terms of shelter, slums are crowded, dilapidated, dark and damp, with poor sanitation. In terms of clothing, clothes are thin and ragged, not strong, and the effect of warmth is very poor. Food quality and adulteration are difficult to digest, and safety is not guaranteed. In the field of labor, workers were forced to work mechanically, causing serious health problems and the spread of occupational diseases, epidemics and infectious diseases. As a result, the majority of workers (including the old and children) tend to age quickly and die early. In terms of intellectual education, basic education facilities are lacking, compulsory education is not really implemented, and rational moral education is lacking. In terms of moral education, the proletariat was ignored and rejected by the bourgeoisie, and could not receive any moral education cooked up by the bourgeoisie themselves. They were often treated harshly as cattle. Mechanical boredom and poor life do not make the proletariat think whether they still need high morals and due dignity. In fact, as long as the proletariat lives in such wretched conditions for so long, and as long as they have a shred of faith to defend their dignity then the proletariat must have the consciousness and courage to resolutely fight against the bourgeoisie.

Second, poverty makes helpless slaves of the proletariat. Competition in the modern civil society is always staged in the brutal war of life and death, at the same time infinitely deepened competition has expanded the ranks of the proletariat, "create" a large number of "redundant people". If only the bourgeoisie would take a look at its pity in the street, the secret of proletarian poverty would be exposed. As for the proletariat, they are pushed into the abyss of misery by the bourgeoisie, and the unbearable pain is becoming more and more, and even their hands are not all their own. At the same time, the proletariat did not live a carefree life because of the prosperous big cities that emerged after the Industrial Revolution. On the contrary, urban life taught the proletariat the most serious and ruthless lesson. Under miserable and helpless conditions, the proletariat has to rethink their life in the capitalist society. They must unite, arouse the consciousness of proletarian struggle, and exert great pressure on the capitalist system and relations of production.

The miserable and poor life of the proletariat makes class struggle inevitable and reasonable. As long as the proletariat and the bourgeoisie are in opposition, the struggle consciousness of the proletariat will only be aroused more, not lost. Once the workers want to get rid of the present miserable situation, they will immediately oppose the bourgeoisie, they must put hatred and pain into their own organization of the independence movement to fight against the bourgeoisie in an open form urgently, in order to fight for their own legal rights and status.

5. How to realize the Labor's Movement: the opening of social war

Under the exploitation of capitalist relations of production and the ravages of economic crisis, the consciousness of proletarian struggle awakens. They have the courage to undertake the historical mission of overthrowing capitalism and fighting for the liberation of mankind. They openly declared war on the bourgeoisie to fight for their own interests. At the same time, in the difficult social exploration, they firm up the faith and direction of socialism. In a word, only when the British working class holds power and becomes the ruling class can the society be truly transformed. Engels believed that there was no more effective way than to use material power to achieve a complete break with the bourgeoisie.

First, we should use material force to make a complete break with the bourgeoisie and reject the use of peaceful means of struggle. Before the Industrial Revolution, workers often resorted to theft, crime and other most uneducated, most unconscious forms of resistance, so this form will not become the general expression of workers' public opinion. After the Industrial Revolution, workers violently destroyed factories, smashed machinery such a scattered, one-sided form of resistance. But as soon as this phenomenon appears, the whole force of social compulsion becomes unusually concentrated to suppress it. In order to make the most thorough struggle against bourgeois power and law, the workers had to give up the means of peaceful settlement, and had to launch a Chartist Movement with a social character in order to establish proletarian power and achieve the goal of social happiness, but their ideas were not realized because of the lack of practicality. Engels believed that, compared with

the lack of practical chartists, the British socialist Owen's views are still closely related to the bourgeoisie, which is harmful to the working class's complete overthrow of the existing society. He pointed out that when the economic crisis came, the combination of chartism and socialism was inevitable, and it was inevitable that the working class would be forced to find a political way out of poverty. Therefore, by analyzing the transformation of the proletariat from spontaneous to conscious, from economic struggle to political struggle, Engels confirmed the powerful power and great future of the proletariat, and was full of confidence in the revolutionary path and revolutionary future of the proletariat.

Second, the proletariat dares to challenge the capitalist system and undertakes the historical task of realizing human liberation. With the great development of the Industrial Revolution, the society has accumulated rich material and spiritual life materials, the birth of the proletariat and increasingly expand their own team, at the same time, under the capitalist factory system, competition makes the working class to live in poverty, promoting its awareness of struggle. Under the circumstances of oppression and exploitation, the workers united to form a powerful force, which promoted the workers to work day and night in the revolutionary activities of their own liberation, and gradually stepped onto the historical stage of political revolution. As Lenin said, "the proletariat is not only a suffering class, but also an advanced class with the great mission of realizing socialism"[6]. For the reason that proletariat has long shed its national prejudices and superiority, and has always maintained its inner purity, and at the same time proletariat admires all good things, has always maintained the consistency of its own interests with those of all mankind, and does not hesitate to regard itself as a member of the great human family.

As mentioned above, the Industrial Revolution made workers subservient to machines, and the shortcomings of the capitalist system exacerbated the poverty of the working class, and the majority of workers lived in misery. Class oppression and exploitation aroused the awakening of the fighting consciousness in the heart of the working class. They knew that only by uniting and openly declaring war against the bourgeoisie could they obtain the right to live like human beings. In a word, theoretically speaking, *The Condition of the Working Class in England, from Personal Observations and Authentic Sources* truly presents the tragic life of the proletariat. It is this kind of life experience that arouses and inspires the struggle consciousness of the proletariat, making them firmer in their proletarian position and creating conditions for liberation through active resistance. The formation of these thoughts was the result of Engels' preliminary exploration of the new world outlook, which laid a solid foundation for historical materialism and the establishment of scientific socialism, thus promoting the development of scientific socialism. In practice, on the one hand, the living conditions of British workers in the book have become history. Although the life of modern workers has improved a lot, there are still many problems, such as workers' unemployment, employment, insurance, education and medical care, which are always worthy of attention and research. On the other hand, Engels' criticism of bourgeois egoism and money morality is of profound enlightenment significance to the construction of socialist market economy and spiritual civilization in China today.

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