

International Political Practice of Austro-Marxism

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Abstract

In the political practice of Austro-Marxism, the Austrian Social Democratic leaders stood in the intermediate position between “the Second International” and “the Third International”, and in the international communist movement, they even used centrist political thinking patterns to lead the “Second and Half International.” We can say that, in international affairs, with the upgrading of the prestige of Austrian Social Democratic Party and the prevalence of the Marxist theory in Austria, the Austro-Marxism centrist road is no longer confined to the domestic political arena and they take advantage of the Social Democratic Party of Austria to exert a major influence on international communist movements.

Key Words: Austro-Marxism; the international communist movement; Second and Half International; Eclecticism

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INTRODUCTION

Before and after the First World War, the Austro-Marxism established their own distinct personality in both their methodology and political tendencies, that is, eclecticism of Marxism. Especially in the late period in its development path, with the rapid increase of its

international influence, it is directly confluence with the reformism. The split time of the international socialist movement is just the peak period of the development of Austro-Marxism political centrist views and the choice of the third way has become the guideline of the Austrian Social Democratic Party between the two world wars. Thus it can be said that, in this period, the centrist politics in “the Austro-Marxism” has become a synonymous of the ideology and political line of Austrian Social Democratic Part (Bauer, 2008, pp.327-330). At the same time, the Austro-Marxism is increasingly actively and frequently participating in the international communist movement, and has played an important role for many times.

1. THE CONFLUENCE OF TWO INTERNATIONALS

The war pushed the differences among the internal factions and each Social Party in the Second International to the extreme and local conflict became into confrontation of a large area. The confrontation between Reformism and Bolshevism in reality is the differences of ideological line of the revolutionary principles of Marxism, but the international socialist movement thus upgraded to split of organizations and movements (Chen, 1992). At the end of World War I, reformists and revolutionaries upheld distinct philosophies on the principles and actions. Their resentment was far away from being settled due to the end of the war. The fragmentation of the international socialist movement affected the worldwide development of the whole socialist cause, so solidarity and unity were a priority then, which was also the reality that the Austrian Marxist spared no efforts to fight for.

The desire of unity of European countries is closely associated with their revolutionary enthusiasm. The unity within the country has been gradually strengthened with

the operation of movements¹. However, the international unity has been difficult. On the one hand, when the centrist forces boycotted Berne International, right-wing Social Democrats completely dominated the theory and practice of this International. Their compromise policies certainly would not seek International unity. On the other hand, the Communist International was founded in March 1919, which marked a clean break with the right wing. At that time, the ideological foundation of the workers' movement is chaotic and the principle of proletarian revolution was not yet understood by the masses of workers in most Middle and Western Europe. The idea of the Comintern was not even as popular as the reformist ideas. In the confrontation of the Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party, the centrist politics which tried to seek a compromise and counterbalance between the two political planning has got the best time to develop and grow, and their ideology built on the basis of this: avoid too radical advocates and also exclude capitulationism of conservatives, which will cater to the main psychology of the workers and achieve a flexible international unity. The political planning of eclecticism for a time has been favored by many European left-wing social movements. Of course the Social Democratic Party of Austria where the Austrian Marxist groups gathered has become a principal member of the centrist force in the international socialist movement and later it even became a dominant force.

Austrian Social Democratic Party was the only Second International party which was not divided after the war. To preserve the unity of domestic and international socialist movements was their principle. During the war, the spiritual core of the Austrian Socialist Party Victor Adler called for the Socialist Party workers in each country to strengthen ties to promote the unity of the workers' class struggle (Braslavsky, 1964, p.218). After the war, the backbone of the Austrian Socialist Party Vladimir Adler and Bauer continued the claim of Victor Adler on international unity. They tried to maintain the party's cohesion in the country and also attempted to positively instill the thinking of centrists in international workers' movement. When the Berne International right-wing forces wantonly pursued the opportunist line, the international unity has become impossible.

Austrian Socialist Party then declared in the resolution that it no longer belonged to the Second International, and it also refused to join the Third International, because from the resolution of the "Second Congress" of the Comintern (especially the twenty-one unreasonable conditions), the Third International was just one central organization of the Bolshevik Party, and it attempted to make the division of the Trade Union International. Also the resolution of

the Austrian Social Party also supported the advocate of the Socialist Party in United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland and other countries for the convening of an international conference. However, they believed that the meeting should not be thrust establishment of a new Fourth International, but to negotiate and establish a worldwide organization with working class unity. The Austrian Socialists followed a political advocate of compromised unity of Austro- Marxism. Thus, in their view, the Second International was "a joint organization of purely reformist and nationalist factions" in the international workers' movement and Comintern mandatorily pushed "all the means used by Bolshevik in workers and peasants revolution in Russia" to all the workers' parties (Ibid., pp.284-285). Austro-Marxism thought that in order to promote and advance the compromise route and in order to achieve "truly universal international", they must re-establish an internationally joint organization.

In December 1920, they held a preparatory meeting in Berne, during which they discussed and adopted the *Notice to Workers in All Countries* and *Notice to Socialist Parties in All Countries*, developed the outline of *Imperialism and Social Revolution* and *On the Way and Organization of Class Struggle*, and elected Vladimir Adler and other four people to compose the Preparatory Committee responsible for meeting matters (Chen, 1992). *Notice to Socialist Parties in All Countries* is the main document of the Berne preparatory meeting, which briefly describes the centrist party's basic proposition and is actually the action agenda for a new international drafted by the centrist party. This document clarifies that all the forces of the world proletariat must be united with the world policy of the proletariat to counter the attempt of the capitalists to rule the world. The document analyzes the current situation of proletarian internationalism. The Second International collapsed thanks to a policy of surrender to the imperialism and the self-claiming Second International then was the joint organization of purely reformist parties in the international workers' movement. The self-claiming Third International, Comintern, then was the joint organization of the communist parties in all countries. Just because the two existing internationals could not unite the world proletariat, these centrist political parties proposed to establish a new international organization to overcome the highly fragmented state of the power of the international working class. Finally, the *Notice to Socialist Parties in All Countries*, in the form of international literature, talked about the means and strategic issues of revolutionary struggle and reaffirmed the claim of Bauer on democracy and dictatorship. Because different countries are at different stages of development, the revolution will take different forms. Centrist views are between the methods of purely trade union activities and parliamentary activities and the sharp struggle methods of workers and peasants and they call

¹ All over the world, the numbers of trade union members and workers' parties in 1923 reached 44 million and 8.5 million. These figures were unthinkable before the start of the war.

for the proletariat to get ready for the final revolution in the daily struggle.

In February 1921, the inaugural meeting of the International Federation of the Socialist Party was held in Vienna and it passed the *Socialist International Joint Statutes* drafted by Vladimir Adler. Vladimir Adler was elected executive secretary and he pointed out in his speech that the Vienna Conference² should unite socialists in all countries, because “they have only one enemy—the world bourgeoisie.” (Mogilevskiy, 1982, p.175) Vienna International (Comintern called it the “Second and Half International”)(Douglas, 1963, p.266) is aimed at uniting all factions of international workers’ movement to form a highly integrated international organization. Specifically, it is aimed at reaching certain dynamic balance with the First and Third Internationals, neither understanding the First International, but also alliance with it against the Third International; it fights against the Third International, and also hopes to achieve ideological reconciliation. Documents and statutes of the Vienna Conference reflect the eclecticism ideas of Austro-Marxism on the socialist model and strategy.

In accordance with the views of the Austrian Socialist Party, the International Federation of the Socialist Party should be the initial stage of the establishment of the new International and it was a transitional organization. Statutes of the International Federation of the Socialist Party claimed that its mission was to unify all the activities of the Socialist Parties which have joined the Federation, determine the concerted action, and try to restore the International of universal revolutionary proletariats. Therefore, after it was established, in addition to continuing contacts with the Berne international, it strived to enlist the support of the Communist International. With the initiative of The International Federation of the Socialist Party leader Vladimir Adler and Bauer, in April 1922, the representatives of the Berne International, the Communist International and the Socialist Party International finally sat together. The Executive Committee joint meeting of the Federation of the three Internationals was held in Berlin. As the initiator of this famous meeting, Vladimir Adler chaired the first meeting and made an opening statement. He noted that the major difference inside the proletariat was the confrontation between the reform and the revolution. There was resistance in the interpretation of Comintern and the Berne International on the methods of struggle and social prospects of the proletariat. Despite seeking unity on the concrete actions cannot deny the contradictory views of each other, for the difficulty in the present workers’ movement, all parties should make certain concessions to reach agreement on issues of common action to improve the current tragic situation.

² The General Assembly of the Socialist International was originally planned to be held in Vienna in August 1914.

Eclecticism is perhaps the best way not to give up the bottom line of each faction.

Fairly speaking, the Socialist International Federation was able to make a great effort in promoting the meeting to achieve results and support the Soviet Union and play a certain role (Cheng, 2010). However, due to differences of principle were not resolved, the actual activities later indicated that this combination was difficult to achieve the desired results and the joint action of the three Internationals was paralyzed again. For Vladimir Adler and others, unity was more important than the principle, which is the essence of Austro- Marxism. Therefore, the centrist position of the International Federation of the Socialist Party could not wait and had to merge with the reformist Berne International.

In May 1923, after nearly a year of preparation³, the merger of the two internationals was completed in Hamburg, which also marked the first confluence of the centrists and right-wing of the international workers’ movement and the Socialist Workers International was born. The meeting discussed the international situation and the theory and practice of the workers’ movement. Bauer made an important statement, and it finally adopted the resolution *On Imperialist Treaty and the Mission of the Working Class*. This is actually a concentrated expression of the theory of imperialism of Hilferding. Social Democrats claimed that the new International “aimed to unite all democratic socialist parties, as an opposite to the authoritarian and Moscow International-centered Bolshevism.” (Braunthal, 1986, p.301) The Socialist Workers International is actually an internal organization which is centered with the Socialist Party, advocates to achieve socialism with the approach of parliamentary democrat reform and openly opposes Bolshevism and communism. It originated from the unity of some right-wing socialist parties and centrist parties in the Second International and then it developed into the Socialist International in 1951 (Zhou, 1989, p.529).

2. THE AUSTRO- MARXISM SAFEGUARDED THE INTERNATIONAL UNITY

After the Socialist Workers International was founded, it was faced with many difficult international and domestic issues, such as amendments to social reform policies, the attitude to treat Soviet Russia and the national movement problems in the East and so on. The resolutions of the General Assembly in Marseille in 1925 and the General Assembly in Brussels in 1928 concentrated on

³ In December 1922, in the General Assembly of the Hague International Peace, two internationals reached an agreement regarding antiwar problems and formed a joint committee in charge of preparations for the merger.

the opinions of the Social Democrats on these issues, among which the Austro-Marxism greatly affected the development of these resolutions not only in theory but also in action.

Since Social Democrats believed that their country was losing its class character, and gradually becoming a social force to organize politics, economy and culture, they defined their mission as, “within the scope of the capitalist system, through social reforms to improve the material status and cultural status of the working class, through political reforms to broaden democracy, through international reforms to ensure peace.” (Braunthal, 1986, p.397) Thus, the General Assembly in Marseille and the General Assembly in Brussels formulated a series of resolutions on improving the situation of the working class. “Organized capitalism” theory, as an integral part of the Austro-Marxism, has become the main ideological foundation of the Socialist Workers International. With the slogan of “economic democracy”, each socialist party were improving industrial democracy policies and measures in domestic economy, tried to expand the socialist component in the national economy, and promoted working class to participate in daily management in businesses and increase the supervision of monopolies. In addition, in the political system, the Socialist Party required to actively use the way of parliamentary struggle, encourage members of Socialist Party to participate in ruling, and establish local self-government. Therefore, we see back then Millerand joining the cabinet caused a great shock in the socialist circle, but now the Social Democrats joining the cabinet has long been accustomed and the members of Executive Committee joining the cabinet has also been directly written into the *Statutes of Socialist Workers International* (Braslavsky, 1964, p.332). However, although the Socialist Workers International group was very strong when the General Assembly was held in Brussels (Braunthal, 1986, p.382) yet the actual effects of the reformist policies of the Social Democrats were not as optimistic as what Hilferding and others had estimated. The Socialist Party in each country collapsed in succession after a short ruling or joint ruling with the bourgeois parties.

Austro-Marxism also dominated the Socialist Workers International, trying to spread reformist thoughts to international politics so as to resolve international problems. Hilferding touted the national principles of the Austro-Marxism in the General Assembly in Marseille. In addition, the Socialist Workers International extremely praised the hypocritical tool of imperialism, “the League of Nations”, and even took it as their hope to re-organize peace (Ibid., p.353). Therefore, they suggested “limiting the sovereignty of certain nations to facilitate the sovereignty of all nations” and thus deprived the national authority to wage war. Hilferding even asked to limit the economic sovereignty of the country and make the

economy of each country subject to the interests of the world economy.

Problems of the experience of the Russian revolution and the universality of Soviet regime have been the focus of international discussions of the Socialist Workers. Bauer was the main spokesman for the General Assembly in Marseille and Brussels. His “attitude of the Soviet Union” remained the same as the international position, that is, more and more hostile to the socialist Soviet Union. This was because of the prevailing of the international internal reform tendency. Although Bauer accused the theory of the Soviet Union that “capitalist war is inevitable” and even treated the Soviet Union as a potential lead of a world war (Droz, 1985, p.203) the attitude of Vladimir Adler and other centrists were opposite to him. They insisted on the legitimacy of the Communist International, Vladimir Adler threatened with this to push the negotiations between Socialist Workers International and the Comintern. However, as the binding effect of the Socialist Workers International weakened, the effectiveness and the protocol of negotiations were watered down and the cooperation between most of the Social Democrat Parities and the Communist Party became useless.

The imperialist Versailles-Washington system aroused the revolutionary enthusiasm of people in colonial countries. Along with the flourishing of national liberation movement in the East, the General Assembly in Marseille and Brussels also put their attention on national and colonial problems. The Austrian Marxists again made statements on areas that they were familiar with. In the General Assembly in Marseille Bauer delivered a report on the “Eastern Problems”. He basically affirmed the positive significance of Soviet Union model, and the resolution on colonial problems passed in the General Assembly in Brussels also further supported by the struggle movement for national liberation in Eastern countries. However, behind the support in principle of the anti-colonial movement of peoples in each country, it has exposed the political attitude of reformists. Regarding the colonial problems, the Social Democrats in all countries praised highly various useless international arbitration institutions (such as the League of Nations which existed as the tool to maintain the postwar imperialist “peaceful” system) established by monopoly bourgeoisie and established the liberation of the colonial peoples on continuous advocacy and the intellectual concessions of sovereign bourgeois government. In addition, the Socialist Workers International also believed the Bolshevism was populism and it was not conducive to the cause of liberation of the Eastern Nations. They warned Asian countries must learn democratic struggle ways from Western Europe. Social Democratic Party just called for the repeal of unequal treaties, but did not come up with effective solutions to national problems. About the approaches to

political independence of colonized peoples to achieve democratic governance and other key steps, they did not answer. In the critical international situation, the Socialist Workers International held the fourth the General Assembly in Vienna (Chen, 1992).

The General Assembly held in Vienna in July 1931 tried to answer the question of how to defend peace, to defend democracy and to defend socialism in a moment of crisis? In this General Assembly, the debate was very intense and the differences of opinion even the formed the left, central and right three wings. The right wing represented the interests of labor aristocracy, supporting the direction that the big bourgeoisie overcame the crisis at the expense of the interests of working people; the leftists tries to keep the results of ten years of struggle of the working people and refuse the concession policy to bourgeois as well as the policy to support the “smallest evil” represented by German Social Democratic Party; the centrists tried to bridge the differences between the right and left wings. They advocated that the social reformist policy must adapt to the changing political situation at home and abroad. In the three wings, the most powerful wing was the Social Democrat centrists. Their leadership core was Vladimir Adler and Bauer. With Bauer as the core, they formed a compromise between the right-wing and the centrists. *The Situation in Germany and Central Europe and Working Class Struggle for Democracy* was the speech Bauer made in the General Assembly and thus a resolution of the General Assembly was drafted. Again, the resolution reflected the fundamental principle of the Austro-Marxism eclecticism: In order to achieve solidarity and unity, verbally they were concerned about the revolutionary sentiment of the leftists, but in practice they compromised to meet the appeals of the right wing. These reports and resolutions were just entirely lists of the political viewpoints of the Austro-Marxism, in which the most important part was about the scope of democracy and dictatorship. The vision of Austro-Marxism on the realization of the socialist road varied from Marxism and it followed the reformist trend. Bauer insisted the “social revolution” would only happen after the seizure of power (“the political revolution”). In Bauer’s opinion, the boundary between socialism and capitalism is ambiguous and socialist elements may exist within capitalism. In the international workers’ movement, the Austro-Marxism implemented the theory of “organized capitalism”, expanding the practice scope of reformism. Its essence is a compromise to the social reality of capitalism. As a consistent political philosophy, the Austro-Marxism have implemented a capitalist parliamentary democracy and taken the “defensive violence” as the bottom line of socialism.

CONCLUSION

Hitler coming to power in Germany shocked the heads of the Socialist Workers International. Facing increasingly arrogant fascist violence, the German Social Democratic Party simply could not use the “defensive violence”. The seemingly powerful German Socialist Party was actually weak, which inspired the discussion of Socialist Workers International to internally review the strategy of labor movement. In August 1933, the Socialist Workers International held a meeting in Paris, but this was also their last meeting. The centrists have been unable to make other wings to reach agreements. Although at last the meeting in Paris passed a compromise resolution which was based on the advocacy of the centrists and took the mood of the right wing and leftists in account, yet from the whole process of the meeting, clearly it was filled with a variety of conflicting thoughts.

The Socialist Workers International that the Austro-Marxism advocated has been unable to establish an anti-fascist united front, and it was too busy to find effective ways to solve bewildering international political and economic issues. Until 1934, this greatly influenced international organizations of the main workers’ movement in central and Western Europe. Along with its social reformist theory and policy, it finally fell into the situation of irreparable split and failure (*Ibid.*).

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