

Strategy and Tactics of the Class Struggle

Abstract

Written: September 17-18 1879;

Full text: [Circular Letter to August Bebel, Wilhelm Liebknecht, Wilhelm Bracke and Others](#);

Transcribed: by Zodiac.

A Private Circulation Letter from Marx and Engels, (First drafted by Engels) to Germany's Social-Democratic leadership — Bebel, Liebknecht, Fritzsche, Geiser, Hasenclever, Bracke.

This was in response to an August 1879 article written by Karl Hochberg, Eduard Bernstein, and Carl August Schramm, entitled "Retrospects on the Socialist Movement in Germany". The magazine piece advocated transforming the German Social-Democratic party from a revolutionary to a reformist platform.

It is an unavoidable phenomenon, well established in the course of development, that people from the ruling class also join the proletariat and supply it with educated elements. This we have already clearly stated in the Manifesto. Here, however, two remarks are to be made:

First, such people, in order to be useful to the proletarian movement, must bring with them really educated elements. This, however, is not the case with the great majority of German bourgeois converts. Neither the *Zukunft* [fortnightly Berlin magazine] nor the *Neue Gesellschaft* [monthly Zurich periodical] has provided anything to advance the movement one step. They are completely deficient in real, factual, or theoretical material. Instead, there are efforts to bring superficial socialist ideas into harmony with the various theoretical viewpoints which the gentlemen from the universities, or from wherever, bring with them, and among whom one is more confused than the other, thanks to the process of decomposition in which German philosophy finds itself today. Instead of first studying the new science [scientific socialism] thoroughly, everyone relies rather on the viewpoint he brought with him, makes a short cut toward it with his own private science, and immediately steps forth with pretensions of wanting to teach it. Hence, there are among those gentlemen as many viewpoints as there are heads; instead of clarifying anything, they only produce arrant confusion — fortunately, almost always only among themselves. Such educated elements, whose guiding principle is to teach what they have not learned, the party can well dispense with.

Second, when such people from other classes join the proletarian movement, the first demand upon them must be that they do not bring with them any remnants of bourgeois, petty-bourgeois, etc., prejudices, but that they irreversibly assimilate the proletarian viewpoint. But those gentlemen, as has been shown, adhere overwhelmingly to petty-bourgeois conceptions. In so petty-bourgeois a country as Germany, such conceptions certainly have their justification, but only *outside* the Social-Democratic Labor party. If the gentlemen want to build a social-democratic petty-bourgeois party, they have a full right to do so; one could then negotiate with them, conclude agreements, etc., according to circumstances. But in a labor party, they are a falsifying element. If there are grounds which necessitates tolerating them, it is a duty *only* to tolerate them, to allow them no influence in party leadership, and to keep in mind that a break with them is only a matter of time.

In any case, the time seems to have come.

It is inconceivable to us how the party can any longer tolerate in its midst the authors of that [Hochberg, Bernstein, Schramm] article. If the party leadership more or less falls into the hands of such people, the party will simply be emasculated and, with it, an end to the proletarian order.

So far as we are concerned, after our whole past only one way is open to us. For nearly 40 years we have raised to prominence the idea of the class struggle as the immediate driving force of history, and particularly the class struggle between bourgeois and the proletariat as the great lever of the modern social revolution; hence, we can hardly go along with people who want to strike this class struggle from the movement. At the founding of the International, we expressly formulated the battle cry: The emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself.

We cannot, therefore, go along with people who openly claim that the workers are too ignorant to emancipate themselves but must first be emancipated from the top down, by the philanthropic big and petty bourgeois. Should the new party organ take a position that corresponds with the ideas of those gentlemen, become bourgeois and not proletarian, then there is nothing left for us, sorry as we should be to do so, than to speak out against it publicly and dissolve the solidarity within which we have hitherto represented the German party abroad. But we hope it will not come to that.

This letter is to be communicated to all the five members of the Committee in Germany, as well as Bracke....

On our part, we have no objection to this being communicated to the gentlemen in Zurich.
