

A Brief Analysis of Scientific Socialism: A Textual Analysis Based on The Development of Socialism from Utopia to Science

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ABSTRACT

The Development of Socialism from Utopia to Science (hereafter referred to as Development) is a classic work of scientific socialism written by Engels based on Anti-Dühring. Marx praised it as "the introduction to scientific socialism." The Development systematically traces the evolution of socialism from utopian to scientific thought, analyzes the theoretical contributions and shortcomings of utopian socialist doctrines, emphasizes the pivotal role of dialectical materialism, and identifies the "two great discoveries" that transformed socialism from utopia into science—the materialist conception of history and the theory of surplus value. It dissects the fundamental contradictions of the capitalist mode of production, reveals the objective historical law of capitalism's inevitable replacement by socialism, identifies the forces and fundamental path of the proletarian revolution, and outlines the basic characteristics of the future society.

KEYWORDS

Scientific socialism; The development of socialism from utopia to science; Engels

1 Introduction

Throughout the historical development of socialism, two theoretical forms have coexisted: utopian socialism and scientific socialism. As the precursor to scientific socialism, utopian socialism played a pivotal role in its exploration, formation, and evolution, establishing an inseparable connection between the two. Utopian socialism served as the intellectual foundation for scientific socialism, which subsequently inherited its rational elements through the socialist movement. Development represents Engels' theoretical response to the dual challenges facing scientific socialism in both theory and practice. Lenin described it as a work that "outlines the history of socialist development". It systematically addresses major questions in Marxist studies: where the "utopian" lies in utopian socialism, where the "scientific" lies in scientific socialism, and the historical inevitability of scientific socialism's ultimate realization. A systematic study of scientific socialism and utopian socialism helps clarify their qualitative distinctions and quantitative connections, elucidates the transcendent relationship and inherent logic of scientific socialism over utopian socialism, and thereby enables us to grasp the developmental laws of socialism more profoundly. This clarifies misconceptions about socialism and strengthens confidence in the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

2 Dialectical analysis of the contributions and limitations of utopian socialism

As the initial form of socialist theory, utopian socialism underwent roughly three stages from the early 16th century to the mid-19th century: the early 16th and 17th centuries, characterized by the simple conceptions of an ideal social system by figures like More and Müntzer; the 18th century, characterized by the vague conceptions of a communist society by Morely and Mably; and the 19th century, marked by the systematic development of utopian socialist theory by the three major utopians Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Owen. "Immature theories correspond to immature conditions of capitalist production and immature class conditions." Utopian socialism left certain historical contributions while inevitably harboring certain shortcomings.

2.1 Theoretical contributions of utopian socialism

2.1.1 Critique of capitalism

Utopian socialist thought reflected and analyzed various social problems and contradictions emerging during capitalist development, mercilessly exposing and profoundly criticizing the social systems of its era—particularly the private property system. To a certain extent, this stimulated people's understanding of contemporary society and their vision for a future society, playing a guiding role in subsequent labor movements. Saint-Simon, hailed as the "spokesman of the working class" in the 19th century, exposed and criticized capitalism from political, economic, cultural, and moral perspectives. He asserted that the prevailing capitalist system inverted right and wrong, declaring that "selfishness, this gangrene afflicting humanity, infects every political organ and has become the common disease of all social classes", where a minority ruthlessly exploited the laboring masses.

2.1.2 Visions for a future society

Utopian socialists proposed numerous progressive ideas and ingenious concepts for an ideal future society. These

provided valuable insights and developmental directions for the subsequent evolution of scientific socialism, representing a rich imagination and beautiful vision in the pursuit of an ideal social system. In Morelly's *Natural Code*, three "fundamental and sacred laws" for establishing a society based on public ownership were legislatively defined: property belongs to the public; reliance on social life; Each according to his ability, each according to his needs. Building upon earlier cooperative ideas and drawing from his own lived experiences, Fourier "designed" a blueprint for a future "harmonious society."

2.2 Specific flaws of utopian socialism

2.2.1 Constrained by rational principles

Utopian socialism posited "human nature" and "human reason" as its starting points, championing the "moral rationality" of supreme collectivism. It attributed the collapse of real society to neglect of truth and justice. Utopians relied on "rational tools" to dismantle the barriers of capitalist society yet failed to propose effective solutions for real-world problems.

2.2.2 Denial of Class Struggle

In the view of utopian socialists, the ideal society is achieved through the liberation of all classes, including the bourgeoisie, rather than through class struggle and violent revolution. Moreover, they believed this liberation was not contingent on time or place. They advocated reconciling irreconcilable contradictions between classes through propaganda, appeals, moral education, persuasion, demonstration, and localized experiments. They generally failed to recognize the revolutionary role of class struggle, denied its propulsive force in class society, and could not identify the class forces capable of abolishing capitalism and establishing a new society. Thus, utopian socialists failed to ground their theories in reality—the fundamental distinction between their approach and scientific socialism.

2.2.3 Championing the heroic view of history

Utopian socialists pinned hopes for social transformation on a few exceptional individuals, overlooking the role of the masses, particularly the proletariat. They believed that the only thing lacking to recognize true reason and justice was the presence of individual geniuses. Thus, recognizing truth and subsequently transforming society was entirely a matter of luck. Under this logic of heroism, they inevitably attributed the capacity to transform and govern society to the elite class, thereby overlooking the power of the masses, especially the proletariat. Consequently, they failed to identify the material forces truly capable of achieving social transformation.

2.2.4 Outlining pure fantasy

The utopian socialists' depictions of future socialism carry unrealistic elements of fantasy. Their ideal blueprint for the future society is merely a concretization of abstract general principles like reason and justice—a "picture of modern society without its dark side". Thus, the more perfect it appears, the more it reveals its impracticality: "The more detailed and elaborate it is, the more it sinks into pure fantasy."

3 Rationally viewing the arguments and responses to scientific socialism

Engels pointed out: "To make socialism scientific, it must first be placed on a real foundation." Building upon the essence of human thought, Marx and Engels completed a theoretical transformation in philosophy and economics, establishing the materialist conception of history and the theory of surplus value. It was precisely through these two major discoveries that socialism evolved from utopian idealism into a scientific doctrine grounded in practical realism. Historical materialism and the theory of surplus value form the twin theoretical pillars of scientific socialism. In *The Development*, Engels critically analyzed utopian socialist ideas while employing dialectics to dissect and demonstrate the developmental realities of capitalist society and the laws governing world history. Simultaneously, he delivered precise and forceful rebuttals to certain erroneous notions about socialism.

3.1 Theoretical arguments for scientific socialism

3.1.1 Historical Materialism

In *The Development*, Engels asserts that the objective laws of historical development and the active role of the masses in creating history together constitute the correct approach to the socialist movement. On one hand, historical materialism "regards history as the development process of mankind, and its task is to discover the laws governing this process." Human society is not a reflection of ideas in the mind but the inevitable outcome of the economic realities of the era; scientific socialism is grounded in social reality. On the other hand, Engels further emphasized in *The Development* that only within a scientific socialist society—a "association of free individuals"—can people achieve higher levels of freedom, equality, and fraternity, thereby fully unleashing their creativity and initiative. He criticized the notion

that humans passively submit to laws in production and life, stressing that “we must make them increasingly subject to our will and use them to achieve our ends”. The materialist conception of history holds that history is created by the masses. Social progress does not result from the actions of a single individual but from the collective efforts of the people. From this perspective, scientific socialism fundamentally opposes the theoretical limitation of utopian socialism, which pins hopes for historical change on the emergence of a single genius.

3.1.2 Introduction of dialectics

“Dialectics worships nothing; by its very nature, it is critical and revolutionary.” “Dialectics serves not only as the theoretical foundation of scientific socialism but also as the crucial methodological framework for its seminal work, Development. Engels emphasized:” The materialist conception of history and its particular application to the class struggle between the modern proletariat and bourgeoisie are only possible through dialectics.” Through dialectics, Engels examined the interrelationships among utopian socialism, scientific socialism, and capitalism from the dimensions of connection, motion, emergence, development, and dissolution. Building upon his critique of the capitalist mode of production, he exposed the concealed class relations of exploitation and alienation between people, thereby identifying the economic roots of class struggle.

3.1.3 The theory of surplus value

The theory of surplus value posits that labor, as a commodity exchanged in the market, sees part of the worker's labor product appropriated without compensation—this constitutes the capitalist's exploitation of wage laborers. Marx and Engels, applying the materialist conception of history, rigorously examined the laws governing capitalist economic operation and the internal dynamics of productive forces. They fundamentally exposed the essence of capitalist exploitation. The creation of the theory of surplus value revealed the facts and means of bourgeois exploitation of the proletariat, identified the causes behind the unequal accumulation of proletarian poverty and bourgeois wealth, thereby scientifically explaining the economic roots of the antagonism and struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. It exposed the inherent contradictions and developmental laws of the capitalist mode of production, scientifically demonstrating the trend toward the demise of the capitalist system. and demonstrated the inevitability of proletarian revolution, thereby identifying the forces for social transformation and charting the path for socialism to replace capitalism.

3.2 Scientific socialism's powerful response

3.2.1 Controversial interpretations of "Scientificity"

Bernstein's conception of “scientificity” leaned more toward “empirical verifiability” and “objective inevitability,” prompting him to launch fierce attacks against scientific socialism's “scientificity.” He argued that scientific socialism's “scientificity” could only be understood as arguments justifying the realization of socialist demands, while socialism itself inherently contained a value-ideal component. In his view, socialism was a doctrine concerning the ideal institutional framework of a future society, and doctrines about future utopian societies could not be definitively verified by rigorous science. His views were later labeled “revisionism” by the official orthodox Marxism of the Third International.

3.2.2 The correct implication of "Scientificity"

The question of the “scientificity” of scientific socialism is a fundamental issue concerning the theoretical foundation. Domestic scholars have responded to the debate over “scientificity” with diverse stances and perspectives. Yet their explorations and interpretations remain profound and compelling. First, some scholars contend that ‘scientificity’ was introduced as a critical concept opposing “utopianism.” Second, others argue that “emphasizing the scientificity of scientific socialism solely from the perspective of opposing utopianism deviates from Engels' original intent”. Third, other scholars contend that the “scientific nature” of “scientific socialism” manifests in its objective analysis of historical laws and its revelation of the inevitability and reality of socialism replacing capitalism. Fourth, a different group of scholars broadens and deepens the interpretation of “scientificity” to encompass “practicality,” “revolutionary nature,” “criticality,” and “developmental nature”.

4 Accurately grasping the inevitable realization of scientific socialism

In *The Development of the Working Class in England*, Engels systematically examined the shortcomings of capitalism and concluded that socialism replacing capitalism was an historical inevitability. He also systematically analyzed the future landscape of scientific socialism, elaborating in detail on the ultimate mission of the proletariat and the fundamental task of scientific socialism. Historical materialism not only explains the inevitability of capitalism's emergence and development but also reveals the inherent self-contradictions within the capitalist social system—namely, the inevitability of capitalism's demise embedded within these laws, which transcends human will. Historically,

the bourgeoisie achieved the socialization of the means of production and the corresponding socialization of production through the concentration and expansion of these means. The social division of labor separated products from their labor owners, giving rise to commodities for exchange, while wage laborers unconsciously became dependent on the factory system.

On one hand, from the perspective of historical subjects, as long as the capitalist mode of production prevails, the proletariat is forcibly and completely separated from the means of production, relegated to an exploited position with no possibility of transformation into other classes. This mode of production enriches the state and capitalists while impoverishing the proletariat through labor. The formation of an industrial reserve army further undermines their ability to sustain themselves, creating "a force compelled to complete this transformation under the threat of death". This manifests as the antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, signifying the proletariat's inherent, intense revolutionary desire to overthrow capitalism by harnessing its own strength to resist its circumstances. The escalating conflict between these two classes is simultaneously the process of accumulating revolutionary power within the proletariat. When the clash between the two classes reaches an irreconcilable point, the proletariat will inevitably launch a social revolution to overthrow capitalist society. From the objective social perspective, the historical inevitability of capitalism's demise stems from the objective necessity of the socialized development of productive forces. The contradiction between the organized nature of capitalist production and its anarchic state prevents production from meeting humanity's socialized needs, leading to relative overproduction and the onset of economic crises. Economic crises concretely embody and authentically reflect the contradictions of capitalist society, serving as compelling evidence for Engels' profound argument that capitalism is doomed to perish and socialism is destined to triumph. These two factors together ensure that capitalism's internal contradictions cannot be resolved thoroughly. Capitalism will inevitably collapse and be replaced by a new social formation—socialism.

5 Conclusion

As a classic work of scientific socialism, *The Development* systematically traces the historical progression of socialism from utopian to scientific thought. It enables readers to gain a clear and comprehensive understanding of the theoretical development and fundamental tenets of scientific socialism, revealing its origins and the foundations of its scientific basis. Engels does not entirely dismiss utopian socialism in the book. Instead, he acknowledges its contributions in criticizing the capitalist system and exposing the truth of exploitation, aspects that still shine with the light of truth today.

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