

Marx's Critique of Proudhonism and Its Implications Introduction

Yongshi Liu

Henan University, Kaifeng 475001, China.

Abstract: The scientificity and truthfulness of Marxist theory are crucial aspects of our research. To gain a comprehensive understanding, it is essential to examine Marxism within a reference frame and comparative perspective. In this regard, exploring Marx's critique of Proudhonism becomes significant, as it provides insights into the ideological transformations he achieved. Proudhonism, a small bourgeoisie socialism and anarchism that emerged in France in the 1840s and spread across Western Europe in the 1850s-1860s, had intricate connections with Marxism. This analysis not only broadens our research horizon but also holds practical implications for today's society. Thus, our research holds both theoretical and practical significance.

Keywords: Marx Critique; Proudhonism; Implications

1. Theoretical significance

Conducive to further studying the development process of Marx's thought. During the formation and development of Marx's materialist conception of history, Marx continuously analyzed and criticized Proudhonism in his texts, and even after the formation of his new worldview, Marx did not stop his critical stance until after the Paris Commune in 1871. In the process of ideological confrontation and debate with Proudhonism, Marx's thought not only gradually matured but also, through the victory in the debate with Proudhonism during the First International, established his leadership position in the First International, which promoted the widespread dissemination of Marxism in the workers' movement. Therefore, the critique of Proudhonism in Marx's thought occupies an important position in the development process of Marxist thought and deserves further exploration.

Conducive to further clarifying the relationship between Marx and Proudhon. Marx and Proudhon were confronted with similar social environments and historical problems to solve, which is why Marx's initial attitude towards Proudhon was not an absolute rejection and criticism. However, due to the different class positions and analytical methods used by the two, they eventually formed an insurmountable "gap" in theory, and serious differences with Proudhon's thought, which constitutes one of the reasons for Marx's critique of Proudhonism.

Conducive to further understanding Marx's critique methods of erroneous ideological trends. While struggling against Proudhonism, Marx also fought resolutely against trade unionism, Bakunin's anarchism, and achieved great victories. Marxism was tested and enriched through this struggle and further developed under the promotion of practical struggle. By studying the evolution of Marx's relationship with Proudhonism and analyzing how Marx surpassed Proudhonism in terms of ideological thought, we can better understand Marx's attitude and methods of criticizing various erroneous social ideologies during that historical period, and further strengthen our Marxist stance.

1.2 Practical significance

The study of Marx's critique of Proudhonism has practical implications for understanding and dealing with contemporary social issues. Proudhonism, as an important ideological trend in the 19th century, had a deep impact on Western European countries and still has theoretical and practical influence today. By critically analyzing Marx's critique of Proudhonism, we can gain insights into the limitations and shortcomings of Proudhonism and its implications for contemporary society, and provide references for addressing similar issues in the present. Additionally, understanding Marx's critique methods of erroneous ideological trends can help us better respond to and criticize various ideological deviations and errors in today's society, and promote the scientificity and truthfulness of

Marxist theory in contemporary practice.

1.3 Understanding Prussianism: Origins, Contents, and Critiques

Firstly, the emergence of Prussianism can be contextualized by examining the social conditions in 19th century France, where the rapid advancement of capitalism exacerbated the contradictions between the bourgeoisie and the working class, resulting in frequent workers' movements. France, at that time, was characterized by a significant presence of the petty bourgeoisie, providing fertile ground for the rise of Prussianism. Additionally, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, who hailed from a petty bourgeoisie background, was deeply influenced by bourgeois and petty bourgeois ideologies from an early age, shaping his main ideas from the perspective of a representative of the petty bourgeoisie. Furthermore, the failure of the petty bourgeois socialism of Louis Blanc during the 1848 European revolution created an opportunity for Proudhon to develop his notions of organizing credit and anarchist theories.

Secondly, the core tenets of Proudhon's thought can be analyzed through the three organic components of Prussianism, namely dialectics, socio-economic theory, and social revolution theory.

Thirdly, Karl Marx's critique of Proudhon can be examined from two angles. Proudhonism gained significant traction as a dominant ideology in mid-19th century France and wielded considerable influence in many European countries during the 1850s and 1860s. However, Marx viewed it as an opportunistic and detrimental trend of thought that posed harm to the workers' revolutionary movement, especially after the establishment of the First International, where Proudhonist members assumed control of the Paris branch, hindering the implementation of Marxist strategies and tactics. Furthermore, as Marx's own praxis developed and his theories matured, his stance towards Proudhon evolved from initial acceptance to thorough criticism, revealing an insurmountable "gap" between their respective ideologies.

Lastly, the intellectual struggle and debates between Marx and Proudhon spanned nearly three decades and can be further explored and analyzed. The first stage entailed the ideological conflict between Marx and Proudhon over the workers' revolutionary movement and the path for workers to escape poverty. The second stage comprised the debates between Marx and Proudhon's successors, the Proudhonists, during the early period of the First International. During this period, the struggle against Prussianism primarily revolved around issues such as leadership within the International, the nature and fundamental tasks of the International, the matter of national liberation centered on the "Polish question," the strategic question of private ownership, and the tactical issue of the path to the emancipation of the proletariat. The third stage occurred after the Paris Commune of 1871, wherein Proudhonism and Blanquism, as dominant ideologies within the leadership structure of the Paris Commune, failed to align with Marxism and could not lead the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat to victory. The Paris Commune's significant revolutionary practice further discredited Proudhonism, leading to its gradual decline within the international workers' movement.

2. Marx's Critique of Proudhonism

2.1 Marx's Transcendence of Proudhonianism: Critique and Development

The ideology of Proudhonianism, with its distinctive "dialectics of series," constructs its own political economy, characterized by a methodological metaphysical nature. In contrast, Marx achieved a transformation from rationalism to materialism, laying a crucial foundation for the emergence of his new worldview. The development and establishment of historical materialism by Marx marked a transcendence of Proudhonian idealism in terms of philosophical methodology and worldview.

Furthermore, Marx's seminal work "The Poverty of Philosophy" represents an important critique of Proudhon's "Philosophy of Poverty," providing a systematic critique of Proudhonian social economics. Alongside the emergence of labor theory of value and theory of surplus value, Marx's political economy thought underwent continuous development in the process of critiquing Proudhonian social economics. "Capital: A Critique of Political Economy" further realized the transcendence of Proudhonian social economic thought.

Finally, Marx conducted a theoretical critique of the philosophical and theoretical foundations of Proudhonian social revolutionary thought, including its idealistic philosophical system and vulgar political economic theories. In the face of the anarchist doctrine of "no political parties, no authority, absolute freedom of all individuals and citizens" advocated by Proudhonianism after the completion of social revolution, which is anti-scientific and unattainable, Marx's communist theory ultimately transcended the reformist ideas of the petite bourgeoisie.

The critique of Proudhonism by Karl Marx holds profound practical significance and provides insights for contemporary society. Proudhonism, as a reactionary ideological trend of petty-bourgeois socialism, poses the risk of confusion and misdirection in its dissemination among society and the working class. Marx's critique of Proudhonism exposes its metaphysical nature and idealistic tendencies, further suppressing the spread and influence of this erroneous ideology within the labor movement.

Particularly during the First International period, Marx engaged in intense debates and conflicts with Proudhonism, which propelled the integration of Marxism with workers' movements worldwide, gradually establishing its leadership position within the International Workingmen's Association. Marx's engagement in the battle against Proudhonism facilitated the development of the international communist movement, creating conditions for the integration of Marxist universal truths with specific national movements.

2.2 Marx's Critique of Proudhonianism: Practical Insights for Contemporary Societal Practices

Marx's critique of Proudhonianism not only serves as a theoretical dismantling of a reactionary ideological trend within small-scale bourgeoisie socialism, but also offers practical guidance for contemporary societal practices. Marx's critique highlights the necessity of adhering to the scientific worldview and methodology of dialectical materialism and historical materialism in real-world practice. It underscores the importance of upholding scientific socialism and delineating the boundaries between Marxism and various forms of socialism using the perspectives of scientific socialism, so as to avoid erroneous ideological trends from spreading among society and the working class.

Furthermore, Marx's critique of Proudhonianism emphasizes the need to integrate Marxist universal truths with the specific practical conditions of national movements. This entails applying the principles of Marxism to concrete social and historical contexts, and taking into account the particularities of each nation's social and economic conditions when formulating revolutionary strategies. By doing so, Marxism can effectively transform the objective world and bring about meaningful societal change.

In this sense, Marx's critique of Proudhonianism offers valuable theoretical and practical guidance for the adherence and development of Marxism. It serves as a reminder to uphold the scientific foundations of Marxism, to critically evaluate and combat erroneous ideological trends, and to effectively apply Marxist principles to specific practical conditions in order to achieve the ultimate goal of social revolution and emancipation of the working class.

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