



Marx and Engels' Peace Thought and Its Contemporary Value

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Abstract: Marx and Engels' peace thought is vital to Marxist theory. They used historical materialism and materialist dialectics as world outlook and methodology to study peace. They analyzed the root and nature of war, revealed various ways to achieve peace under different conditions, and made a blueprint of a permanent peaceful world of the future human communist society. In the face of major changes in the current world unseen in a century and the increasing uncertainty and instability in China's security, it is highly valuable that we deeply study Marx and Engels' peace thought again. Using Marxist standpoints to rationally analyze the domestic and international situations help us comprehensively and accurately grasp the theme of the times. It is of practical significance to strengthen the peaceful development concept, actively build a community with shared future, and continuously realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

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Marx and Engels did not exposit peace in a comprehensive and systematic manner. Analyzing all Marx and Engels' speeches and works, we found "peace" were discussed from different angles on various occasions under different backgrounds. Taken together are two aspects: one is the thought of war and peace; the other is the international principle of the new society (communism)—peace. The in-depth study of the thought will help us better grasp the theme of the times, more effectively formulate social and economic goals in the new era, provide critical

theoretical support for harmonious development and properly handle foreign relations.

1 The main content of Marx and Engels' peace thought

1.1 Marx and Engels' thought on war and peace

Using dialectical materialism and historical materialism, Marx and Engels analyzed war and peace. For the first time in human history, they scientifically discussed the nature of war and peace, revealed the rule of its development, and put forward the proletariat's policy and strategy.

First, the definition and root of war. Marx and Engels made no direct definition of war. Carl von Clausewitz, a famous German military historian, gave the "best definition" to Marx and Engels' concept of war. He put: "War is not only a political act, but also a real political tool. It continues political exchanges and realize exchanges through another means.... Political intent is an end, while war is a means. Means without a purpose can never be imagined^[1]." Lenin spoke highly of what Clausewitz's said, and he pointed out that "War continues politics through another means (violence)." "Marx and Engels always follow this to investigate all kinds of wars^[2]." Lenin believed that Clausewitz's understanding is completely consistent with Marx and Engels'. According to Marxist historical materialism, the root of war is unitary, that is war is rooted in society and economy. As addressed in *The German Ideology*: "Thus all collisions in history have in the contradiction between the productive forces and the form of intercourse." Marx and Engels have investigated the entire history of war, and demonstrated the view with no exception, regardless of tribal conflicts in primitive society or wars in social class. And they distinguished special

manifestations of the roots before and after classes generated. “Violence is only a means while economic interests are ends. The ends are much more ‘basic’ than the means used to achieve them^[3].” Private ownership is the root of class wars, and it leads to the confrontation of economic interests. Then the confrontation leads to the birth of regime and armies, thus making war possible. Interest confrontation is the origin of war in class society^[4]. Marx and Engels scientifically explained the root of war from historical materialism. “As long as there are classes with opposing interests, conflicting and different status, the war will not be extinguished^[5].” Thus, abolishing private ownership and social class can eliminate war and enable human to gain permanent peace.

Secondly, the nature and type of war. Based on the war influence, Marx and Engels distinguished its nature into just and unjust war. They believe revolutionary, liberating, defensive wars against foreign aggression and defense of the motherland are just wars, while predatory, aggressive, hegemonic, and infringing wars against the sovereignty and interests of other countries are unjust wars. They had a clear stand as the proletariat and its political parties who also support just wars and oppose unjust wars. Capitalist revolutionary wars such as the British bourgeois revolution, the North American War of independence and the French Revolution, cleared away obstacles in capitalism. The national liberation movements in colonial and semi-colonial countries such as the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal struggle of the Chinese nation and the Latin American independence revolution, opposed foreign aggression and realized national self-determination. These wars conform to the laws of history, promote human development and social progress, thus they are just. When the capital economy developed to a certain level, war becomes indispensable for capitalists to maintain rule internally and expand externally. As Marx analyzed, “Louis Bonaparte used class struggle in France to usurp power, and extended his rule with foreign invasion from time to time^[6].” The colonial wars of the bourgeoisie against Asia, Africa and Latin America and wars for hegemony between the capitalist powers were capitalists’ foreign aggression, both tortured domestic and other people. These wars are immoral as they hindered development.

Finally, the policy and strategy of the proletariat to

war and peace. Based on historical and international situations, Marx and Engels viewed the social impact and historical role of war dialectically. They clearly opposed war, and strived for world peace. Because wars of any nature are highly destructive, as Marx said, “even ordinary wars, are sufficient to cause a country with advanced productive forces and needs to have to start right over again from the beginning^[7].” and war is also a double-edged sword for workers’ revolutionary movement. It can bring about revolution, but also can weaken it. The fruits of the legal struggle may be deprived of, and the liberation movement will regress. As Marx pointed out, “War will naturally lead to serious consequences, and it will result in revolution in the end. But in the beginning... domestic movements weakened Britain and Russia; wars aroused extremely narrow national enthusiasm in Germany, etc., therefore, for me, it is counter-revolutionary in all aspects at the beginning^[8].” Because war destroyed and hindered the proletarian revolutionary movement, they advocated that “the proletarian liberation movement should not resort to war at will”, and the proletariat and its political parties must oppose war and maintain a peaceful international environment. “Once there is a chance of victory through peace, revolutionaries must avoid wars. The more mankind progresses, the more they resolve contradictions without war^[9].” The concept was reflected in Engels’ series of letters and articles in his later years. Engels analyzed the international situation at the end of the 19th century, and while clarifying the harms of war, he called on the proletariat to unite and jointly oppose militarism and chauvinism, to maintain world peace and effectively curb the growth of war. The strategies that a possible war should adopt are: “Disarmament, thereby ensuring peace, is possible^[10]”, “Socialists in all countries support peace” and “striving for peace at all costs^[11]” “The unity of the world working class will eventually eradicate all wars^[12].” To fight for world peace, Engels adopted two specific strategies: one, the proletariats maintain peace at all costs, curb and oppose war, launch the liberation movement in a relatively peaceful situation; Second, the proletariats bravely challenge the war and use the opportunity to accelerate revolution, overthrow the rule of the bourgeoisie, and achieve socialism.

1.2 The international principle of Marx and Engels of the new society (communism) is peace

Marx and Engels believed the root lies in the interest conflict of class and the contradiction between productive forces and production relations of the old system. They guided proletarian movements to “eradicate all wars” to create “a new society opposed to the economically impoverished and politically corrupted old society..., and the international principle of this new society is peace, because every nation will have the same ruler—labor!”^[13] In other words, when there is no ruler except common labor, through the International Workers’ Association, an international cooperation organization with a peaceful nature, we realize the labor and international cooperation. This can effectively stop wars, and realize permanent peace. War will die out with countries demise and human society develops, and a new society with peace as its principle is bound to come. After the world’s proletariat was liberated, the contradictions will be eliminated. The free development of everyone will be realized. As “The free development of everyone is the condition for the free of all people”, with tremendous social productive forces, enriched social wealth, full exchanges of human, no classes and countries, mankind will enter an era of permanent peace, and the world will achieve real peace^[14].

2 Contemporary value of Marx and Engels’ peace thought

Recent years have seen complex and volatile international situation. As General Secretary Xi Jinping said at the 22nd collective study meeting of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, “Currently, the world has accelerated major changes unseen in a century. COVID-19 has a profound impact on the international pattern. Uncertainty and instability arise in China’s security.” The peaceful world is facing unprecedented challenges. We need to use Marx and Engels’ peace thinking to correctly understand the complicated international and internal conflicts, clarify the trend of war and peace, thus responding to new challenges calmly and rationally.

First, dialectically thinking the intertwined existence of overall peace and partial wars today, and correctly grasp the theme of peace and development. With the end of the Cold War and the development

of economic globalization, the world multi-polarization has become increasingly prominent, and more countries choose to co-exist on equal cooperation and common development. On the whole, the world maintains peaceful. Even under the COVID-19 where the world economy suffered a lot and anti-globalization has accelerated, the historical process of globalization has not changed. Countries only strengthened their own national governance and participated in global governance on this basis. Besides, many uncertainties have led to local turbulence and conflicts, and even wars. The current Sino-US relations is also an important predicament facing us. We must accurately grasp the theme, proceed from the overall world peace, so as to make firm and correct strategy to flexibly respond to America’s competitive strategy to China and to challenges at home and abroad effectively and appropriately. We will actively seize China’s strategic opportunity, concentrating on the construction and development wholeheartedly.

Second, handling international relations with peace thought, and actively promote a community with shared future for world peace. Marx and Engels saw the destructive effects of war and its impact on social development, so they affirmed that peace is an important guarantee for the progress of human society. Only peace can eliminate disasters and sufferings of war and promote social development. Therefore, we must adhere to the concept and actively promote the community with shared future. We oppose unjust wars by mobilizing all forces that can be mobilized. Striving for world peace is the eternal pursuit and common expectation of mankind and it requires concerted efforts of people from all countries. In his later years, Engels talked about the elimination of hidden dangers of war by reaching international agreements. Based on this, we should actively integrate into the world system, build relations between major powers within the global governance system, and strive to create an external environment conducive to national development. By building a community with shared future, we accelerate the multi-polarization and democratization of international relations, promoting the development of the international political and economic order in a more just and reasonable way.

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