

The Scientific Socialist Thought in “*Anti-Dühring*” and Its Contemporary Value

Xiang Wang, Haozhe Min, Junyan Sun, Qinghua Yue, Xiaoqiang Zhao

School of Marxism, Shandong University of Technology, Zibo, Shandong 255000

Abstract: Studying Marxism with the study of classic works as its “root” reveals the rich philosophical theories and strong practical significance within these works, providing fundamental guidelines for the continuous advancement of society in new contexts. “*Anti-Dühring*” is one such work. This book, comprising 27 chapters, reflects the three components of Marxism and their intrinsic connections. This paper summarizes the relevant theoretical ideas presented in the book and focuses on exploring the content and value of scientific socialism, offering effective references for enhancing ideological understanding and clarifying the direction of progress.

Keywords: Ideological Theory; Scientific Socialism; Contemporary Value

“*Anti-Dühring*” is a work by Engels written in response to Dühring's attacks on Marxism. Centered on the fundamental principles of Marxism, Engels critiques Dühring's erroneous theories. In the process of refuting Dühring, Engels thoroughly explains related Marxist theories. His exposition in this work is marked by precise language and rigorous logic, and it represents the first systematic summary of Marxist theory. Furthermore, it clarifies the characteristics of Marxism and the historical process leading to the emergence of scientific socialism, earning it the title of “the encyclopedia of Marxism”. The entire book uses the critique of Dühringism as a starting point and, in the process, argues the essential principles of Marxism related to scientific socialism. The completion of this work not only enriched the content of Marxist theory but also promoted its dissemination and development.^[1]

1. The background of the creation of “*Anti-Dühring*”

Anti-Dühring was created in the mid to late 19th century. During this period, the workers' movement was significantly influenced by various “pseudo-scientific” ideas. The merger of the German Social Democratic Workers' Party and the Lassalleans, while expanding the influence of the domestic working class, also led to ideological disunity within the party. It was in this social context that Dühring, under the guise of “socialism,” published a series of pseudo-scientific theories known as “Dühringism.” This had many adverse effects on Germany at that time. Consequently, to steer the German workers' movement in the right direction, Engels spent two years writing *Anti-Dühring*, a work that refutes Dühringism. The book profoundly analyzes Dühring's worldview in the context of social development at the time. It emphasizes that society moves through class opposition and that the only way to eliminate class opposition is by engaging in targeted social practices, leading to a society that transcends class opposition and makes a truly free society possible for everyone. Engels used numerous real-life cases to systematically summarize the revolutionary theories and practical achievements of the international communist movement since its inception. By understanding the historical process of Engels' creation and publication of *Anti-Dühring*, it becomes evident that modern socialism largely emerged from a comprehensive examination of the class opposition between workers and exploiters.^[2] This understanding is essential for deeply comprehending Marx and Engels' thoughts, upholding the program of scientific socialism, and promoting overall social progress.

2. The Scientific Socialism Ideology in “*Anti-Dühring*”

The emergence of ideological theories in each period is closely linked to the economic and social conditions of that era. Practical results have proven that the history of the 1870s, which was rife with worker movements, is largely a history of class struggle. These conflicting classes, to a great extent, represent the development of relationships between production and exchange in the process of social development. Simultaneously, ideological theories are also products of the economic relations of their time. Therefore, the entire superstructure of ideological forms in each era ultimately needs to be explained by the real foundation formed by the social economic structure of that era, leading to the emergence of the corresponding ideological theories of that period.^[3] “*Anti-Dühring*” mainly elaborates on the following three aspects of scientific socialism, as detailed below:

2.1 The foundation of the "scientific nature" of socialism lies in practice

Dühring takes "principles first" as his logical starting point, with idealistic apriorism as his logical premise. He believes that the so-called "principles" should be those forms derived from thinking. In "*Anti-Dühring*", this is criticized in the philosophy section. Engels points out that Dühring views the so-called principles as the starting point and driving force for the construction of the world and the development of social history, which aligns with idealistic apriorism. In contrast, Marxist theory explains that principles are based on practice, combined with objective reality, and are the result of abstracting and generalizing the external world with specific purposes. This is the foundation of the "scientific nature" of socialism. The so-called view of nature often refers to ontology as discussed in past philosophy, which elaborates on theories about what the world and things are. In Marxist philosophy, epistemology mainly deals with the theories generated in the process of people understanding the world. Dialectics, to some extent, is an extension based on ontology and epistemology. This constitutes Marxist philosophy. Additionally, Engels criticizes Dühring's metaphysical view, acknowledging the eternity of time and the infinity of space.^[4] He believed that Dühring's metaphysical view of the "first cause" ultimately led to religious idealism. Regarding the nature of life, Dühring argued that "in the study of biology, combination should replace development in the future". This reflects the content of metaphysical mechanistic and reductionist views. Consequently, in "*Anti-Dühring*", Engels criticized Dühring's metaphysical ideas from the perspective of dialectical materialism. It is precisely due to the in-depth analysis of these issues that Marxist philosophy has become more systematic and scientific, combining both critique and construction on a practical basis.

2.2 The "scientific nature" of socialism cannot be separated from the theoretical development, inheritance, and criticism

In expounding his related theoretical ideas, Dühring regarded political economy as the ultimate truth and the fallacy of violent intervention in the economy. Through the relevant theoretical viewpoints in "*Anti-Dühring*", Engels specifically criticized Dühring's vulgar economic views, providing a comprehensive summary and generalization of the core concepts and theoretical essence of Marxist economics. He pointed out that Marxist economics mainly includes the labor theory of value, the theory of rent, and economic theory.^[5] He believes that social systems and class oppression originate from the economy, which is the foundation and determining factor of social development. The economic base determines the superstructure. Immature theories correspond to immature social production conditions. A society in a constant state of exploration and development mainly exhibits flaws, and measures to eliminate these flaws primarily stem from rational thinking and guidance by systematic scientific ideas. Therefore, it is necessary to further explain the relevant political economic thoughts to guide the emergence of more perfect social systems.

2.3 Critique "pseudo-socialism" to argue for scientific socialism

The theory of scientific socialism must be problem-centered, focusing on resolving social contradictions. Engels, through his theoretical views in "*Anti-Dühring*", tells us that the greatest problem of capitalist society is its inability to effectively handle the relationships between the rich and poor, labor and capital, and the numerous contradictions arising from these relationships. Therefore, to further develop scientific socialism, it is necessary to place the objective interrelations of things on a realistic basis to solve the practical problems faced, thus ensuring the enduring effectiveness of Marxist theory grounded in reality. For theoretical scholars, the main task of thinking is to explore the internal regularities existing in the corresponding development processes through phenomena. In light of issues such as the wealth gap in capitalism, Engels, in the critique of socialism section, systematically and profoundly critiqued many of Dühring's spurious socialist statements through corresponding theoretical exposition. Based on this, he critiqued the essence of capitalist production to further demonstrate the necessity of socialism.^[6]

3. Studying the Contemporary Value of Scientific Socialism Thought in "*Anti-Dühring*"

In the history of Marxism's development, the work "*Anti-Dühring*" holds a relatively important position. Therefore, studying the scientific socialist theory within "*Anti-Dühring*" is highly valuable.

3.1 Reading classical original works helps to grasp the fundamental principles of Marxism

As the guiding ideology of international communism, Marxism largely led them to gradually learn to analyze and solve problems based on practical realities, thereby further advancing the continuous development of society. In his book "*Anti-Dühring*", Engels profoundly criticized Dühringism.^[7] As a field of study within the broader development of human society, in the context of various ideological and theoretical clashes, the correct handling of the relationship between the directionality and the stages of development has gradually become a dividing line between true and false Marxists. The book's systematic exposition of the basic principles of Marxism largely enables every reader to internalize the scientific essence of Marxism, specifically enhancing their dialectical thinking abilities and correctly handling interrelationships. Moreover, studying the content related to scientific socialism in "*Anti-Dühring*" helps us correctly understand the basic national conditions of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and positively impacts the development of the Sinicization of Marxist theory.

3.2 Cultivating dialectical thinking helps grasp the essence through the phenomena

In "*Anti-Dühring*", Engels' methodological characteristics are extremely rich. His discourse on scientific socialism includes both a critique of Dühring's idealistic a priori reasoning and an in-depth analysis of human rights concepts. These discussions can foster dialectical thinking, helping to grasp the essence through phenomena. For human thought, there are numerous contradictions inherent in the process. Specifically, the nature of human thought can be seen as absolute to some extent. However, this thought, regarded as absolute, is realized within the completely limited developmental process of the thinking individual.^[8] This contradiction can only be resolved through the continuously developing and changing historical process. From this perspective, understanding human thought can lead to the conclusion that human thought is supreme, but it may also be limited by the constraints of human cognition, resulting in imperfect thinking. Therefore, thought may not be entirely supreme. To grasp these related contents, it is largely necessary to enhance one's ability to distinguish right from wrong. This allows us to maintain a pragmatic attitude in the development process of specific matters, consciously applying the materialist view of history to determine the truth, understand contradictions with universal laws, resolve contradictions, and deeply comprehend that contradictions are the driving force behind the development of things. This objective law does not change according to human subjective will. This insight teaches us that in understanding the development process of things, it is necessary to grasp the essence through phenomena, follow the historical development trend, and keep pace with the times. Only in this way can we follow the footsteps of history and not be left behind by the era.

3.3 Learning practical methods helps in mastering the dominance of ideological debates

The combative and constructive nature of the book "*Anti-Dühring*" runs through its main ideological content. In discussing the ideas of scientific socialism, Engels starts from the problems and, in the process of systematically refuting Dühringism, decisively defeats his opponent. The work is coherent, with clear viewpoints, a resolute attitude, and sharp language, fully demonstrating the power of ideological weaponry.^[9] In this process, Engels not only refuted falsehoods in his writings but also timely elucidated and propagated the truth. Additionally, by explaining relevant theoretical viewpoints and their intrinsic connections, he established the first complete Marxist theoretical system. The practical, theoretical, and artistic language expression presented throughout the book remains highly worthy of our study and reference today.

In summary, "*Anti-Dühring*" is a theoretical work by Engels, based on epistemology and worldview, elaborating corresponding viewpoints. In the economics section, Engels primarily refutes Dühring's theory of violence. Finally, by systematically explaining and correcting Dühring's fallacies about socialism, Engels provides a comprehensive discussion of the ideas of scientific socialism.^[10] As a "Marxist encyclopedia," its enduring influence remains significant. The greater value of this book lies in its potential to be explored, absorbed, and understood through future social practices, in conjunction with concrete developments. This will further enhance individual ideological understanding and provide effective guidance for the direction of social progress.

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