

APPENDIX 9

TO EACH ACCORDING TO HIS WORK: SOCIALIST PRINCIPLE IN DISTRIBUTION

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The principle—to each according to his work—was smeared by the “gang of four” as an “old thing” left over by capitalism.

Has the world ever seen a system of distribution based on the principle “to each according to his work” since human society came into being? Did it exist in primitive society? No. At that time, equal distribution of primitive communism was practised. Was there such a thing as “to each according to his work” in slave, feudal or capitalist society? No. The principle of distribution in societies with private ownership is that the exploiting classes which own the means of production squeeze surplus labour out of the exploited classes. “To each according to his work” is out of the question in these societies.

The principle “to each according to his work” can be practised on a country-wide scale only in a state under the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is because there the means of production originally owned by the landlords and capitalists have been confiscated and turned into property owned by the whole people, and individual ownership by the labourers has been transformed step by step into collective ownership on a voluntary basis through the form of co-operatives.

The principle “to each according to his work” means that individual consumer goods are distributed according to the amount of labour a worker has done after his labour for the common funds has been deducted. In accordance with this principle, everyone, except those who have lost their power of labour or those who have not yet reached the age of a labourer, must work. He who works more gets more, he who works less gets less and he who does not work, neither shall he eat. This is a great revolution in the system of distribution. It is a new thing which can emerge only in socialist society.

Bourgeois Right and This Principle

Since the principle “to each according to his work” is a socialist new thing, then why did Marx say that equal right is still—in principle—bourgeois right?

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Dealing with the distribution system in socialist society in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Marx wrote: "As far as the distribution of the latter [means of consumption] among the individual producers is concerned, the same principle prevails as in the exchange of commodity-equivalents: a given amount of labour in one form is exchanged for an equal amount of labour in another form." "Hence, equal right here is still—in principle—bourgeois right." Obviously the phrase "bourgeois right" Marx referred to here concerns only the exchange of equal amounts of labour. In capitalist society, everything is a commodity, the exchange of which is worked out according to the principle of exchange of equal amounts of labour. In socialist society, individual consumer goods are also distributed on this basis. It is only because of this that Marx said that this principle is still—in principle—bourgeois right.

Equal right arising from the principle "to each according to his work" is a right of inequality among different labourers, because the productive capacity of each worker is different and their family burden cannot be the same. As a result, their living standards also vary. This of course is a defect. But this is considered a defect only when it is compared with the principle which will be practised in future communist society—to each according to his needs. If compared with the situation in capitalist society, "to each according to his work" is an extremely equal and highly reasonable principle.

Historical conditions should be considered when speaking of equality or inequality. There was equality in primitive society, yet it was replaced by the unequal slave system, because the latter is more progressive than the primitive communal system and can better promote the development of the productive forces. The same holds true when the feudal system superseded the slave system and also later on when the capitalist system superseded the feudal system. Compared with society with private ownership, the socialist system marks a great leap forward. Nonetheless, it cannot wipe out all inequality overnight. Distinctions between town and country, between industry and agriculture and between physical and mental labour will exist for quite a long time. These distinctions are nothing but forms of inequality. Equal right arising from the principle—to each according to his work—is a defect because the principle recognizes differences, i.e., actual inequality. But this defect is not caused by the principle itself.

The Principle Is Not the Economic Basis Engendering the Bourgeoisie

The theorists fostered by the "gang of four" said that after the completion of the socialist transformation of the ownership of the means of

production, bourgeois right (what they meant was the principle “to each according to his work”) was the “soil” on which the bourgeoisie grew. That is to say, due to the practice of the principle “to each according to his work,” those with higher incomes will constitute a new bourgeoisie.

This is a distortion of the socialist system.

The prerequisite for the enforcement of the principle “to each according to his work” is the public ownership of the means of production. Under this, the income of every labourer, no matter whether it is big or small, is created by his labour. No one is entitled to grab the fruits of other people’s labour. How can a new bourgeoisie “emerge” from this kind of distribution!

True, a few newborn bourgeois elements will turn up in socialist society. But these persons do not set themselves up by the practice of this principle. They become upstarts through speculation, embezzlement, theft or appropriating collective or other people’s property by the exercise of various illegal privileges. Wang Hung-wen, a member of the “gang of four,” was a typical example. Could he support his utterly decadent life-style with the income he was entitled to? The “gang of four” and the old and new bourgeoisie they represented were opposed to the principle “to each according to his work” and undermined its application. They became members of an exploiting class through “unearned income.”

According to another notion, a certain amount of savings from a person’s wages may be used in speculation since commodities can still be bought and sold for money. This poses an opportunity for the birth of new bourgeois elements. This viewpoint actually means that the socialist distribution principle constitutes the economic basis for the emergence of a bourgeoisie. The argument is not valid. “To each according to his work” refers to the way a person gets paid for his work. The blame for his using his savings to engage in speculation cannot be laid on how he is paid.

Marxists hold that in socialist society there is the danger of capitalist restoration, but it is not inevitable. Socialism is the first phase of communism, not the higher stage of capitalism. The economic system of socialism, including the principle “to each according to his work,” cannot in any way be the base giving rise to the bourgeoisie.

This Principle Should Be Practised At Present

Chairman Mao said: “In the last analysis, the impact, good or bad, great or small, of the policy and the practice of any Chinese political

party upon the people depends on whether and how much it helps to develop their productive forces, and on whether it fetters or liberates these forces.” (*On Coalition Government, 1945*)

The counter-revolutionary revisionist theories and line of the “gang of four” seriously hampered the development of the productive forces in our country. The most powerful of the productive forces is the revolutionary class itself. The key to the growth of production lies in arousing the labouring masses’ enthusiasm for socialism. Arousing the people’s enthusiasm depends on doing political and ideological work on the one hand, and on correct economic policies on the other. Neither of them can be dispensed with. Among the two, politics is the commander. While political and ideological work helps improve the people’s understanding of things, the distribution principle “to each according to his work” solves the practical problem of material life.

The higher the level of a labourer’s ideological consciousness is and the better his life becomes, the more ardently will he love socialism and the more consciously will he plunge into his work. This will help raise labour productivity greatly. On the basis of the growth of production, the income of workers will be further raised and their life will be further improved. By these repeated advances, the material base of the proletarian dictatorship will become ever stronger and the people’s material life and ideological consciousness will be steadily improved and raised. This is the superiority of socialism.

The “gang of four” used a demagogic method to attack the socialist distribution principle, that is, criticizing socialism by “praising” communism, using the principle of communist society—to each according to his needs—to debase the socialist principle—to each according to his work.

Of course we must look far ahead and aim high, and should not forget the lofty ideal of communism. The system “to each according to his work” is sure to be superseded in the future by the more advanced system “to each according to his needs.” But communism can be built only on the basis of socialism which is a long historical period. Not only will our generation live in socialist society, but many generations to come will do so. If we only talk about communism without enforcing socialist policies and building socialism in a down-to-earth way, how can we gradually go on towards communism?

This principle of distribution “from each according to his ability, to each according to his work” conforms to the basic Marxist principle as well as to the Constitution of our country. It fits in with the level of development of socialist production, and is a valid distribution policy for the present stage.