

# The “intellectuals” and party principles

By Karl Kautsky

[The decision of the Chemnitz Congress to exclude Hildebrandt from the German Social Democratic Party has done more than simply provide subject for comment in the capitalist and proletarian journals and reviews. It has given rise to a manifesto supported by a hundred Revisionists, who pretend to see in the expulsion an attack on freedom of opinion and the “rights of science”.

Kautsky had already shown in the *Neue Zeit* that the charge of “excommunication” is absurd. He replies to the manifesto of Bernstein, Frank, Südekum, and company in another article, of which the second part has too wide a bearing not to be given in translation to our readers. Its interest is general.

After having demolished the complaint of intolerance by showing that nobody has in any way prevented, or been able to prevent, Hildebrandt from publishing what he likes, he makes an end of the “rights of science”. Does an opinion of no matter what kind, when covered by a scientific cloak, thereby confer the right to be a member of the party? How many times has Socialism been condemned in “the name of science”? Can we do that and yet remain in the party? Can one with impunity oppose “scientific” results to the party’s action against imperialism, colonial wars, the madness of armament, and the like? He then raises the question and goes into causes, and it is this second portion that will be read below.—BRACKE.]

Their protest will, on the contrary, arouse energetic opposition because, under pretence of safeguarding the liberties of science, it claims something else. It claims that those who are, or claim to be, men of science, shall be freed from the discipline of ordinary comrades having only an “inferior and limited reasoning power”.

And that is the point. The recent manifesto is only another effort to secure special privileges for “intellectuals” in the party.

At first it was asked that members of Parliament, especially those in the provincial Diets, be not bound by party decisions. Next it was Socialist mayors who should be put above the reach of such decisions. Now it is the Congress which should no longer have the right to say what opinions are Socialist and what are not, when the opinions are those of an “intellectual” who knows how to write books.

The intellectuals would have all the rights of a party comrade but not his duties.

The men of scientific research calmly leave the duties to the proletariat.

There is no need to be an admirer of “horny-handed” politics in order to congratulate ourselves that the workers have always repulsed the pretension of the “intellectuals” to a privileged position in the party, as, it is to be hoped, they will repulse such pretensions in future.

Indeed, such demands will be made more and more. We must see in them a phenomenon inherent in the growth of the Party.

That “intellectuals” who come to us find themselves soon or late in discord with the party for some reason or other is nothing unusual. Such a thing happens much more rarely with proletarians because the necessities of the class struggle hold them more naturally.

So long as the party was small, and the work done accessorially, and the number of Parliamentary mandates in its gift was small, so long the separation of the individual from the party was easy and painless. But it is another story to-day, when the party disposes of so many mandates and editorships [There are 71 Socialist dailies in Germany.—B], and so many existences are attached to it. The separation of an individual can then become a painful operation, and it is natural that more than one, finding himself in contradiction with the party, seeks to avoid expulsion by getting the party to relax its principles. If he does not succeed he sees in it an insupportable hindrance to his liberty of opinion.

Another factor—perhaps even more important—has the same effect; I refer to the constant intensification of class oppositions.

So long as our party, and also the trade unions, were weak, sympathy for the masses played a great role in the bourgeois world. This sympathy diminishes as the proletariat becomes stronger and the capitalist world more threatened. All those “friends of the worker” who desired an amelioration of the working class and at the same time remained bourgeois in their way of thinking owing to their inability to conceive another method of production than the present, lose little by little all echo among the capitalist class. In order to act effectively they feel themselves constrained to go toward the only party in which it is practicable to show a love of the worker—the Socialist Party. But with all the good will, all the loyalty possible, their activity is not profitable.

What the “intellectuals” can bring to the proletariat is solely a superior scientific knowledge. But it is just that which cannot give the elements to one unable to surmount bourgeois narrowness of view. Their intelligence only allows them to graft bourgeois ideas on those of the proletariat, to bring confusion and dispute, and a weakening of the class struggle.

They would be valuable if they remained in the bourgeois camp and acted there in the interest of the working class. That, I admit, is rendered increasingly difficult by the growing class antagonism; but it is, nevertheless, not impossible. And all that they might do there for the workers would be so much gained.

We have only to reflect on a certain Abbe who rendered eminent service [Ernest Abbe, who died a few years ago, was one of the directors of the famous Zeiss optical factory at Jena. To him are due several useful things for the workers. For example, the *Volkshaus*, where congresses and meetings are held, is a legacy from him—B.]; yet he would only have done harm if he had got it into his head to lead a political campaign in our ranks.

Notwithstanding this, attempts are constantly being made in such a direction by

people not qualified. Indeed, the hope of getting thus into universal consideration by the easiest possible way is not the least attraction of such a course.

The capitalist Press makes haste to-day to signal with a flourish of trumpets everything that can be regarded in our party as a step taken towards capitalist ideas. Writers who would be completely ignored if, as Liberals, they had expounded Liberal ideas, are glorified to the skies when they publish such ideas as members of the Socialist Party. What a great man Caliver was so long as he called himself a Socialist [Richard Caliver, a plucky revisionist, who warmly defended the fiscal policy of the Empire. He had finally to leave the party.—B.]. Since he ceased to have that title his very name is forgotten.

And that is the great danger that threatens the “scientific research” of people like Hildebrandt! Their science loses all its value and ceases to interest anybody the moment they no longer belong to the party. What caused attention to be paid to the “research” of Hildebrandt was not its importance as knowledge, but simply the fact that a Socialist was able to proclaim such anti-Socialist ideas!

Their scientific value is the slightest possible. Not a single comrade, so far as I know, agrees with his opinions. His friends certainly say that his ideas are of the highest scientific value, but they add that they are false. What an accession to our scientific knowledge!

We find in the *Worker's Voice* the following summary:

“The views of Hildebrandt have not been approved nor even defended from any part of the Congress. Even those comrades who spoke against his expulsion separated themselves completely from him on the facts. Comrade Müller (of Munich) declared: ‘This book, whose tendencies are shared neither by me nor by any other member of the Commission . . .’ etc., and further on: ‘I hold these economic considerations to be absolutely inconclusive.’ In the same way Comrade Gradnauer said: ‘Hildebrandt represents ideas which are, indeed, very different from those held by the rest of the party.’ Again, Comrade Heine said: ‘Hildebrandt is a lost child with whom I identify myself in no way.’ Before the Congress, Hellmann (of Chemnitz) had already declared at a Party meeting that Hildebrandt’s book was, scientifically speaking, practically worthless.”

Very true! All its value consists in that the man who wrote it had the right to call himself a Socialist, and to be considered by the capitalist Press as a proof that Social-democracy began to deny its own aims and convictions. This cheap advertisement is now lost to Hildebrandt. That is undoubtedly very unpleasant for him, but can hardly be a barrier to scientific research. We can, however, understand the painful feelings of more than one signatory of the protest, whose scientific importance rests on no other foundation.

Given the circumstances, we must expect that there will constantly emerge from our midst “intellectuals” who, seeking certain ends by certain means, will try to throw down the barriers set up by our party. Political evolution constantly prepares and widens the ground for these attempts; it is, in fact, prepared by the very nature of

intellectual labour.

In my booklet on the Social Revolution I have already indicated that the evolution of *material production* increasingly prepares the ground for *Communism*, but that *intellectual production* develops the tendency to individualism and anarchy.

I came thus to the conclusion that “the type of a Socialist method of production is Communism in general, and Anarchism in intellectual production”.

This opposition between the consequences of material and intellectual production has an effect on the activity of our party. Men engaged in material production are much more easily organised and disciplined than those in intellectual production. The latter are always inclined to be undisciplined and Anarchist.

This must be understood, but not condoned, in a party organised for the class struggle.

We can have no need of any intellectuals but those able and willing to submit to the discipline necessitated by the class struggle. He who cannot do this may be an excellent man, or even perhaps a scientist of some eminence; but he is worth nothing as a Socialist. Such a man must seek his ideal outside our organisation.

(translated from *Le Socialisme*)

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