Victor Adler: the ‘Aulic Councillor of the Revolution’

Victor Adler shared the goal of a classless society with Karl Marx, the principal ideologist of the workers’ movement. But the path taken to achieve this goal was to be different.

For the founder of the Austrian Social Democratic Party, Victor Adler, the essential issue was the improvement of the social situation of working people. Particularly in the area of education Victor Adler saw that a huge amount needed doing; what education should foster was not only the ability to read and write, but above all the development of political and social awareness. In a speech given to the Workers’ Educational Association in Gumpendorf, founded in 1867, he stated:

*The education of the working class is such that it has consciously set itself a major task and is fulfilled by this, that with clear understanding it will pursue the construction of a social order, that it will give to the proletariat totally different educational opportunities than our poor educational association, with its limited resources, has been able to achieve.*

In 1885 Adler was instrumental in getting a law passed to ameliorate the life-threatening conditions experienced by factory workers: the working day was now limited to eleven hours, child and youth labour and night shifts for women were forbidden. Three years later there was obligatory health insurance for workers, and in the following year a compulsory accident insurance scheme for workers was also introduced.

The socialist ideal of the struggle for a classless society was thus conceived not in revolutionary terms, as suggested by Karl Marx, but as an evolutionary development. Its demands should be met within the existing state structures. Because of its specific character, this political route became known as Austro-Marxism after the First World War, and Adler was given the nickname ‘Aulic Councillor of the Revolution’. On the day of the foundation of the Social Democratic Party, 30 December 1888, party leader Adler recorded his principles:

*The Austrian Social Democratic Workers’ Party, working for the whole people without distinction of nation, race or sex, strives to liberate them from the chains of economic dependency and political injustice, and to raise them from intellectual atrophy.*
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Literature
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