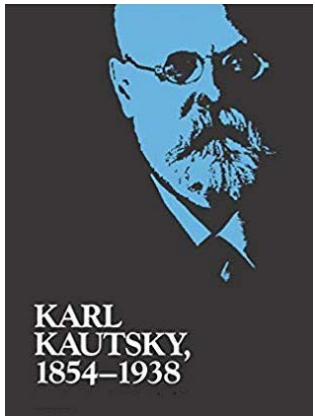
The Development of a Marxist*

Karl Kautsky 1930



Abstract

Karl Kautsky (1845–1938) was one of the most important Marxist thinkers of his age. In this life sketch written in 1924, he outlines his intellectual development and how he came to be such an important Marxist theoretician.

I

I gladly meet the invitation to provide a characterisation of my life work with a particular focus on my economic views. My life work is nearing its end, and if a summary of this work is to come from me then it is time to take up this task.

The state into which I was born no longer exists. It was wrecked by the storms of 1918. Yet already in my youth it was in a process of decline and decay, and this profoundly influenced my own development. My very own lineage was a mirror image of the hodgepodge of nationalities in the Austrian empire. I was born on 16 October 1854 in Prague, the son of a Czech father and a German mother. My mother's father was Viennese, but his father came from Hungary (I suspect from Croatia) and was married to an Italian woman. My mother's mother was from Lower Austria. My father's father was Czech, but his mother was of Polish origin.

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« Das Werden eines Marxisten », in Felix Meiner (ed.),
Die Volkswirtschaftslehre der Gegenwart in Selbstdarstellungen,
Leipzig, 1930.

My father was of a Czech nationalist mindset. By contrast, my mother's father lived for almost two decades in Prague without learning a word of Czech. At that point, Prague was still a German city in terms of its vernacular. In 1848 my grandfather took up the cause of the Germans *vis-à-vis* the Czechs with such decisiveness that when rebellious Prague was bombarded by Windisch-Grätz,[1] the agitated Czechs placed him in terrible hardship.

The reaction then hit Czechs and Germans equally hard, and at times the common hatred of the police regime partly bridged-over the national antagonisms. It was during this period that my parents got married. I was their first child.

I grew up in hatred of the absolutist regime, but also with contempt for the state itself, the viability of which hardly anybody from the Germans or the Czechs – at least in the circles which formed my immediate environment – believed in, following the blows of 1859 and 1866[2] and the rise of national antagonisms which were intensifying day by day.

My first political idea was the idea of the nation. I was filled with Czech nationalism, and the most radical, Hussite, kind at that. Yet from the outset I had not been one-sidedly Czech nationalist. My mother tongue was German, as was my mother's. Having moved to Vienna at the age of nine, I grew up there in a wholly German environment. So, from 1866 on, I began to have national feelings for the Germans in Austria in so far as I desired their reunification with the other Germans in a republic. In this sense I sympathised with the national cause of the Hungarians and the Italians. I revered Kossuth[3] and above all Garibaldi.[4] I hoped that they would destroy Austria.

This indeterminate political-emotional life, which of course was rather childishly formed, was then struck by the Franco-Prussian war. I stood on the side of Garibaldi. I was enthused first by the French Republic and then the Paris Commune. In so doing, however, I came across an element that until then had been completely alien to me, but henceforth captivated me with all its might: socialism. Associated with socialism was the idea of internationality.

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1 Alfred I, Prince of Windisch-Grätz (11 May 1787 to 21 March 1862) declared martial law in Bohemia to suppress the armed insurrection of Czech separatists in Prague in June 1848.

2 'The blows of 1859 and 1866' refer to two military defeats suffered by Austria – against France and Prussia respectively.

3 Lajos Kossuth (19 September 1802 to 20 March 1894) was Regent-President of the Kingdom of Hungary during the 1848–9 revolution. He demanded parliamentary government for Hungary and constitutional government for the rest of Austria.

4 Giuseppe Garibaldi (4 July 1807 to 2 June 1882) was a pivotal military and political figure both in the revolutions of 1848–9 and later in the unification of Italy. In 1849 he led the defence of Rome against a French force sent by Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte.

From the beginning, my national vein had not been configured to a single nation alone. It thus cost me no effort to arrive at international thought; not a thought which shows no interest in, or understanding for, the idea of nationality, but which attempts to accommodate each nationality with equal interest and understanding, which wishes to offer each of them a thriving home on this earth through the free and joyful interaction of all.

Socialism gave me more to do. What I learned about socialism from newspapers did not provide a clear picture. Back then it was impossible to get hold of really informative literature on socialism in Austria unless you were particularly fortunate, and this stroke of luck evaded me.

Since my interest in socialism had emanated from the uprising in Paris, that is to say from France, I snatched at everything that I could find out about socialism in French-language literature. The socialist novels of George Sand[5] made the deepest impression on me. Not that they offered much by way of clarity about socialism. They were truly not suitable for that, yet they gave me strength and confidence. What I had been able to learn about socialism from individual intimations off my own bat was of course highly muddled and the subject of much scorn in my surrounding environment; the socialist movement as a whole was treated with such disparagement in these circles that I was unable to rid myself of doubts and concerns about it.

Then I saw how George Sand, who back then was most highly revered universally, threw her lot in with socialism. This gave me the most exhilarating confidence.

I acquired some positive knowledge of socialism when Louis Blanc's[6] historical works fell into my hands – *Histoire de la révolution française* [*The*

5 George Sand (Amantine-Lucile-Aurore Dupin), 1 July 1804 to 8 June 1876, was a successful French novelist who was also active in the 1848–9 upheavals, establishing her own newspaper, which was published by a workers' co-operative.

6 Louis Blanc (Louis Jean Charles Joseph Blanc), 29 October 1811 to 6 December 1882, was a reform-orientated socialist who infamously joined the French provisional government during the revolution of 1848. According to Kautsky, Blanc 'thought it was possible – and therein lies his historical distinctiveness – to convince the more noble and intelligent sections of the propertied classes of the necessity of socialism, because they suffered under capitalism and free competition no less than did the proletariat. Louis Blanc envisaged the means of realising his socialism as consisting of a state authority standing above all classes, powered and enlightened by the best elements of the entire nation. His socialism, therefore, had to be a peaceful one, inimical to any idea of class struggle. He did not envisage the victory of the proletariat, but the victory of reason, which is the same for all classes. He aimed for social production, but not through the conquest of capital's means of power and the expropriation of the capitalist class. For him, the workers' cooperatives set up and supported by the state

History of the Great Revolution, 12 volumes, 1847–69] *Histoire de dix ans* [*The History of Ten Years*, 1846] and finally *Histoire de la révolution de 1848* [*The History of the 1848 Revolution*, 1870].

However, what I could glean from them in terms of socialism was still very unclear and sentimental. This did not change until 1874, when I got hold of the Austrian party's newspaper, *Die Gleichheit*.[7] I now became aware of German socialist literature, initially in the form of Lassalle's[8] writings, but I equally became aware of the need to study political economy.

II

It was not until 1874 that I attended university in Vienna. My time in secondary school was disagreeably extended by an illness and its aftermath. I enrolled in the Faculty of Philosophy. Soon after, in January 1875, I joined the Social Democratic Party. From then through to today my activity has been divided between scientific thought [*Wissenschaft*] and politics, theory and practice. It is not up to me to judge whether the one aspect of my work stimulated or restricted the other. I am inclined to think that the close connection between theory and practice was useful to me, providing many an insight which would

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were to grow alongside the capitalist enterprises, gradually expanding more and more' (Kautsky 2011, p. 306).

7 *Die Gleichheit: politische Zeitschrift für die Interessen des arbeitenden Volkes* [*Equality: Political Newspaper for the Interests of the Working People*] was founded in Vienna in 1870, but was banned in 1877. Following the death of his father, Victor Adler (24 June 1852 to 11 November 1918) used some of his inheritance to finance a new version of *Die Gleichheit*, known under its full name as *Equality: A Social-Democratic Weekly*, which he founded in December 1886.

8 Ferdinand Lassalle (11 April 1825 to 31 August 1864) was a controversial figure in the history of the German workers' movement. Through his strict, dictatorial leadership of the General German Workers' Association (ADAV) he contributed much to breaking the German working class from liberalism and establishing an independent working-class party, the principles behind which he outlined in his famous 'Open Letter' of 1863. Yet simultaneously he held a host of ideas which were clearly inimical to the idea of working-class independence, not least his views on the Prussian state and his flirtation with a possible alliance with Otto von Bismarck and the German *Junker* class against the bourgeoisie. For an interesting discussion of his impact on German social democracy, see Lih 2006, pp. 53–61, for whom Lassalle's 'emotional appeal of the call to a historical mission and the organisational implications of preparing the workers to carry out that mission' mean that Lassalle 'can indeed be called the first Social Democrat' (Lih 2006, p. 60). In 1893, Eduard Bernstein wrote an 'orthodox-Marxist' appreciation of Lassalle's life which was heavily influenced by Friedrich Engels (Bernstein 1970).

have been closed off from one-sided theory or practice. In this exposition I am only to concentrate on the development of my scientific thought, not my political development. Yet I cannot entirely refrain from discussing the latter as well – it was too great an influence on my scientific thought.

Following a glowing period of growth, the party in Vienna was in rapid decline at that time. There was nobody in its ranks who could have guided me intellectually. Yet I was also unable to find anybody among my colleagues and professors at the university who had even touched upon the problems which occupied me, let alone showed any interest in them. Given my feelings of insignificance, I did not dare to contact the preeminent socialists outside of Austria. I thus sought my path in scientific thought alone, without any guidance.

Even in secondary school, historical assignments had absorbed me the most. I decided to become a historian and principally attended lectures on history, especially those given by professors Max Büdinger[9] and Ottokar Lorenz.[10] Yet I was not content with simply presenting history. I was looking for a theory of it, for a principle which drove the historical process forward. Since nobody provided me with such a theory, with all the rashness of youth I immediately drew up a bold plan to write a history of the world all by myself at the age of 21. And since this of course would mean beginning with Egypt, Mesopotamia and India, I went about studying their history.

In addition to the study of history, I also occupied myself with the natural sciences. In the 1870s, Darwinism[11] captivated the whole of the educated world. I enthusiastically accepted it and my theory of history was to be nothing other than the application of Darwinism to the development of society.

It roughly amounted to the theory developed by Professor Gumplowicz in his 1883 book *The Struggle of Races*.[12] Of course, I had no idea about this book around 1876. And by the time Gumplowicz published it, I had already

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9 Max Büdinger (1 April 1828 to 22 February 1902) was a German-Austrian historian and professor of general history at the University of Vienna, a post he took up after becoming a Catholic.

10 Ottokar Lorenz (17 September 1832 to 13 May 1904) was a German-Austrian historian and genealogist who taught at the University of Vienna.

11 Saage 2012 provides an interesting overview of the relationship between Darwinism and social democracy.

12 Ludwig Gumplowicz (9 March 1838 to 19 August 1909) was a Polish jurist and political scientist who is counted amongst the founders of modern European sociology. He also wrote extensively on issues of the state and administration in Austria, something that also occupied Kautsky throughout his career. In 1883 Kautsky wrote a review of Gumplowicz's *The Struggle of Races*, entitled 'A Materialist Historian' (cited in Blumenberg 1960, p. 33).

progressed from my original point of view to another one. Alongside history and Darwinism, however, socialism also demanded its rights. It drove me to study economics.

I immediately got down to Marx's *Capital* but failed completely and turned away from it, disheartened, until I remembered that the book actually strove to be 'a critique of political economy' and that I first of all had to learn how to understand political economy before reading *Capital*. The stuffy Roscher[13] was the first economic textbook I could get hold of. As a first introduction it was very useful, but it struck me as too dry. Things were quite different with Adam Smith and [David] Ricardo, whose works I then went through, as well as those of John Stuart Mill. Then at the height of his fame, Mill, like Buckle,[14] occupied me much more than Marx did for years. On the other hand, I was also interested in the counterpart of the Englishmen – Carey,[15] who was also read widely in the 1870s – and in his prophet Dühring.[16] Yet I was always critical of their one-sidedness and even had an aversion to Dühring's work because of its excessive arrogance and barrenness. I was all the more taken by another

13 Wilhelm Georg Friedrich Roscher (21 October 1817 to 4 June 1894) was a German economist who was influential in the formation of the so-called 'historical school' of political economy in German academia. Between 1854 and 1894 he composed a five-volume overview of political economy, the first volume of which has been translated into English under the title *Principles of Political Economy*. For a brief comment on the impact of the 'historical school' on Kautsky's understanding of imperialism and global power-politics, see Macnair 2011, pp. 10–12.

14 Henry Thomas Buckle (24 November 1821 to 29 May 1862) was an English historian who is best known for his extremely ambitious yet incomplete work, *History of Civilisation in England*. Buckle treated history as an exact science and influenced Kautsky in his early years.

15 Henry Charles Carey (15 December 1793 to 13 October 1879) was an 'American School' economist who favoured economic protectionism for the development of domestic industry.

16 Eugen Dühring (12 January 1833 to 21 September 1921) was a philosopher and economist who taught at the University of Berlin before being dismissed after a clash with the authorities. He was a fierce critic of Marxism and dialectics. He invented highly regimented ideas for 'the state of the future' and there was an underlying antisemitism to his thought. He is known mainly through Friedrich Engels's *Anti-Dühring*, which was occasioned by some of Dühring's ideas becoming popular in the German workers' movement (Engels 1959).

German professor, Schäffle,[17] who in the years of the Anti-Socialist Laws[18] had been close to socialism. Alongside him there was also Albert Lange.[19] I was not interested in his philosophy (I was an inveterate materialist) but in his social views, which had so many points of contact with Mill and Darwin.

Darwinism was also my first work's point of departure. In Malthus[20] I had found much to object to, but with Darwin I recognised that living organisms all exhibit a tendency to proliferate beyond their scope of sustenance [*Nahrungsspielraum*]. To be sure, I rejected the doctrine that the poverty which exists in society stems from overpopulation. In this regard I fully accepted the socialists' critique of society. But I parted from my comrades in that I had to concede that there would be a danger to socialism when it eliminated the poverty of the lower classes: the general prosperity would necessarily lead to overpopulation and thus, following a temporary improvement, to new poverty. The socialists' objections to Malthus, which assumed a mystical adaptation of human fertility to a respective expansion in their scope of sustenance, struck me as invalid. I only found refuge in neo-Malthusianism, which in the mid-1870s was quickly gaining in significance.

I thus entered into socialist literature with a book which was opposed to the prevalent socialist point of view. At that point I was still cool towards Marx and my economic views were of a highly eclectic nature.

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17 Albert Schäffle (24 February 1831 to 25 December 1903) was a sociologist, lecturer at Vienna and other universities, politician and, for a few months in 1871, Austrian minister for trade and agriculture. He later influenced Bismarck's decision to carry out social reforms, particularly workers' insurance.

18 The Anti-Socialist Laws (1878–90) were introduced by Otto von Bismarck as part of his two-pronged strategy to counter the influence of social democracy. On the one hand there was state paternalism, social insurance and reform, but on the other came this legislation which banned socialist organisations, meetings and publications. This notwithstanding, the German social democrats could still stand for election to the Reichstag, which provided its main tribune for agitation and for spreading socialist ideas. German social democracy defied the measures, not least due to the extremely organised 'red postal service', which would smuggle the weekly newspaper, printed in Switzerland, to all subscribers. The laws fell with Bismarck himself.

19 Friedrich Albert Lange (28 September 1828 to 21 November 1875) was a neo-Kantian philosopher, economist, politician and socialist who was also a member of the First International.

20 Thomas Robert Malthus (13 February 1766 to 23 December 1834) was an English cleric and writer who argued that the danger of rapid population growth ensured that within time famine or disease would naturally ensue, returning the population to a more sustainable number.

The title of the book was *The Effect of Population Increases on the Progress of Society*.[21] It was already finished in the spring of 1878 and a socialist publisher, Bracker, had agreed to publish it in the autumn. Yet immediately after this the ominous shots of Hödel and Nobiling sounded,[22] the Anti-Socialist Laws were introduced and for a long time it was impossible to conceive of socialist publications in Germany. I was glad that with the help of friends I was able to convince a Viennese publisher to bring out the book in the autumn of 1879. To save on printing costs I omitted two historical excursions, one on Ireland and one on India, which I had initially wanted to publish in the form of an appendix. There was a predilection to present these two countries as proof of the idea that poverty results from the population increasing too rapidly. From their history and social living conditions I now attempted to prove that the poverty in these areas was independent of increases in their respective populations.

Soon after, I published the excursion on Ireland as a pamphlet.[23] As Engels would put it, I left the far more extensive one on India, which had cost me a lot of sweat, to 'the gnawing criticism of the mice',[24] because when I was finally in a position to publish it, my conception of history was no longer what it had been when I wrote it. I had arrived at Marxism.

III

During this period I was not only motivated by scientific questions and party politics. I played an active role in the party in the form of contributions to the Viennese party press and the *Volksstaat*[25] in Leipzig, which in 1875 was

21 Kautsky 1880a (cited in Blumenberg 1960, p. 25).

22 Emil Heinrich Max Hödel (27 May 1857 to 16 August 1878) and Karl Eduard Nobiling (10 April 1848 to 10 September 1878) attempted to assassinate Kaiser Wilhelm I within a month of each other. Nobiling took his life immediately after realising that the plot had failed and Hödel received the death penalty. The furore caused by such assassination attempts, which were becoming quite commonplace in 1880s Europe, provided a pretext for the legal crackdown on the socialist movement.

23 Kautsky 1880b (cited in Blumenberg 1960, p. 25).

24 Engels's famous comments on the fate of Marx and Engels's 1845 manuscript, *The German Ideology* (Engels 1975–2004a, p. 353).

25 The main publication of the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany (the so-called Eisenachers) between October 1869 and September 1876. It was edited by Wilhelm Liebknecht. Marx and Engels both contributed to it.

renamed *Vorwärts*.[26] Through this activity I came to correspond with Wilhelm Liebknecht. In 1876, I met him and [August] Bebel on a trip to Leipzig.

Alongside this activity there was also a personal matter which had occupied me ever since I had been at university: how should I earn a living? The more my own fate merged with that of the party, the more forlorn were my prospects of an academic career. As an active social democrat it was impossible to become a professor or even a teacher in a secondary school. Back then, however, the prospects of earning a living from party work were just as poor. The party press was meagre, its number of editors small and their pay reminiscent of the wages received by the weavers. Contributors to the press were unpaid.

I thus looked around for a profession which could make me economically independent and yet allow me to continue my intellectual and political work, something I had already realised was going to be my life work.

At first, I considered becoming a lawyer. I switched as early as the second semester and enrolled in the law faculty. Yet I soon realised that I was unfit to be a lawyer. My thought always assumes historical forms. When it comes to ascertaining the interconnections of something, I am above all occupied with the question of how it came into being. Finding my way in mathematical or legal thought always costs me much effort. I would have hardly achieved anything as a lawyer. So in the third semester I switched back to philosophy. But at the same time, I had surrendered to magic, namely the magic of art.

My father was a painter, as was my grandfather. From my childhood on, I was familiar with pictorial production and artistic views and I had amateurishly drawn extensively as far back as secondary school – it was only natural that I would seek to make a living as a painter. However, an eye complaint forced me to give up this career after a few months. As painful as the disappointment was to me, it was probably a blessing. My teachers assured me that I did have talent. But it is impossible to become a major artist without devoting one's whole being to it. Art does not tolerate intense devotion to science and politics simultaneously, unless you are a real great, a Michelangelo or a Leonardo da Vinci. I would have probably been a mediocre painter and would have thus lost the ability to focus on those areas outside of art which I certainly would have had to neglect the most. I would have therefore only been able to achieve mediocre things in both fields.

Initially, I tried my luck at another art form. My family was even more closely associated with the theatre than with painting. My father and grandfather were theatre painters. My mother was an actress and she wrote novels after illness

26 *Vorwärts* was the central publication of the German Social-Democratic Party, published daily in Berlin from 1891 until 1933.

had forced her to step down from the stage. Already as a student in secondary school, I had written plays and novels. In 1875 I even tried to publish a novel which dealt with social affairs. The Hamburg party newspaper[27] to which I submitted the novel turned it down because the editor did not want to spend the rest of his life in jail for publishing it. It violated too many laws. Soon after, I forwent publishing it for another reason: it struck me as youthful folly.

But might I not have had more luck with a play if it did not breathe the defiance of a protesting rebel but instead was as harmless as something like Schweitzer's pranks, which in the 1870s captivated the world?[28] In 1878, I managed to get a play onto the stage in Vienna – it was not even a flop.

But the performance made it clear to me that I lacked the necessary dramatic vein. Although some friends persuaded me to make further attempts, I came to the conclusion that this career did not hold any prospects either.

In 1879, I was most disappointed and unsatisfied. All my attempts to create a sphere of activity independent of the state and the party had failed. The book I had completed in 1878 lay unpublished in the drawers of my desk, and the party in which I had placed such hopes appeared to have collapsed under the blows of the Emergency Law.[29]

In such a situation, I initially thought that I could do no worse than to complete my studies, which until then I had only gone about in a casual manner alongside many other things which seemed far more important. I now wanted to focus on these studies with the greatest enthusiasm and began thinking about a doctoral thesis. My book would not have been suitable for this, although later, after it was published, it won the praise of Adolf Wagner.[30] However, back then the *cand. rer. pol.* had not yet been invented. I had to produce a historical thesis and chose as my topic [Thomas] Jefferson's involvement in the French Revolution. I had studied the French Revolution with particular zeal, and my

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27 The title of the play was *Atlantic Pacific Company*. It was performed on several occasions but never published. Werner Blumenberg argues that Kautsky's memory failed him when recalling the play's fate: he did not lose interest in it after it was rejected but actually sought the help of Wilhelm Liebknecht, who was to arrange for its publication (Blumenberg 1960, pp. 11–12).

28 Jean Baptista von Schweitzer (12 July 1833 to 28 July 1875) was Lassalle's successor as leader of the German ADAV. Kautsky is probably referring to his novel, *Lucinde oder Kapital und Arbeit* [*Lucinde, or Capital and Labour*], of 1864.

29 See footnote 18.

30 Adolf Wagner (25 March 1835 to 8 November 1917) was a 'socialist of the chair [*Kathedersozialist*]', economist and an early member of the Christian Social Party of Workers, which later became the Christian Social Party. Wagner's Law of increasing state involvement is named after him.

attention had been drawn to the relations between French and American democrats by the work in the Historical Seminar of Professor Büdinger, under whose supervision I intended to do my doctorate.

I initially threw myself into studying American history and its specific character. I was just beginning to feel firm ground under my feet when there was a new turning point in my life.

A young man of letters from Frankfurt with significant funds, Karl Höchberg,[31] had joined German social democracy shortly before the Anti-Socialist Laws and actively assisted it during this time of emergency. He supported it financially and published several newspapers aimed at spreading socialist propaganda. In Leipzig, he published the *State Economic Treatises* under the name of Dr Karl Seyfferth. It did not openly champion socialism, but treated economic issues from the perspective of a 'state-run economy'. In Zurich he sponsored the appearance of the political weekly, *Social Democrat*,[32] and under the name of Dr Ludwig Richter published the *Almanac for Social Science and Social Policy*.

Liebknecht made me aware of Höchberg, and in the course of 1879 I wrote a few contributions for the latter's publications. He was interested in me and offered me the opportunity to publish my book. Eventually, after it had been published, he made me an offer to come to Zurich and enter into his service as a permanent contributor to his publications. I gladly took him up on the offer. I had finally found what I had been looking for. There was no longer any insecure groping-around and wandering in various directions in search of a career. From then on, I lived exclusively for economic and historical research and applying the results of this research to politics. This work, which until then I had performed for free, now also brought me the means to exist, although at times I lived quite hand-to-mouth.

IV

I moved to Zurich in January 1880. It was as though I had arrived in a new world when I came out of the village-like confinement of Viennese party life

31 Karl Höchberg (8 September 1853 to 21 June 1885). For a discussion of his various publications, and Marx and Engels's suspicion towards him, see Gilcher-Holtey 1986, pp. 20–35.

32 *The Social Democrat* was published between 1879 and 1890 as an illegal weekly newspaper which was extremely influential across the whole of Europe. It was produced first in Zurich and then in London. Bernstein edited it from 1881 to 1890. Its entire archive has been reproduced in Bartel, Schörder, Seeber and Wolter (eds.) 1970.

and was placed in the environment of German social democracy. Back then, the German party was already significant, even if initially only through its central phalanx, the emigrants in Zurich. At a single blow, my horizons had been expanded enormously, and at the same time I acquired what until then I had been lacking in terms of theory, namely teachers and guides.

Nevertheless, Karl Höchberg was my own age and unable to be either. His intellectual interests were primarily of a philosophical nature. He was especially interested in ethics and the history of music. He was not interested in the theoretical aspect of economics, only the practical. His socialism was completely un-Marxist and I found it to be unsatisfactory, because for all my concerns I had gradually become more and more infected by Marxism. The more my general knowledge of economics grew, the more I learned to treasure Marx's *Capital*. And my conception of history had begun to be reorganised ever since I familiarised myself with Engels's *Anti-Dühring*, something that by no means happened immediately after its publication. Engels initially published his critique of Dühring in *Vorwärts* in Leipzig in a series of instalments which were spread so far apart that the series lasted from January 1877 through to July 1878! Publishing in this way meant that any impact was lost. The book was published in the beginnings of the Anti-Socialist Laws, when we were concerned with things other than theory. Nonetheless, the document preoccupied me because in my economic and historical thought I strove to overcome my previous eclecticism and to achieve uniformity.

I found a powerful guide for this purpose in the form of Eduard Bernstein,[33] Höchberg's secretary. Five years older than me, he had grown up in Berlin, stimulated by the most active socialist life that the world knew of at the time. He was far superior to me and provided me with abundant information and encouragement. He had overcome his temporary inclinations towards Dühringism and placed himself on the ground of Marxism with both feet.

We eagerly studied Marxist literature together and in the process became so much of a heart and soul that we were regarded as a kind of red version of Orestes and Pylades.[34] Our studies were greatly supported by getting to know

33 The surviving correspondence between Bernstein and Kautsky has been published in its entirety across four chronologically-ordered volumes: cf. Schelz-Brandenburg (ed.) 2011, Schelz-Brandenburg (ed.) 2003 (two volumes), and Görtz (ed.) 2011.

34 In Greek mythology Orestes (the son of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon) and Pylades (the son of King Strophius of Phocis and of Anaxibia) were close cousins whose intimate relationship is often portrayed as romantic or homoerotic.

the two old masters in London, whom [August] Bebel has already reported on in his memoirs.[35]

Since Marx and Engels were highly suspicious of Höchberg and his literary ventures, Bebel and Bernstein were sent to London in the autumn of 1881 in order to bring about a *modus vivendi*. In March 1881, I was sent over to continue the good relations which had been established. I stayed in London until June. I only seldom visited Marx. His wife was already seriously ill, and already recognised her fatal end to be unavoidable, so I was hesitant to disturb the quiet of the house with frequent visits. I got together with Engels all the more as a result. Our acquaintance became friendship and led to an intimate communication which was partly oral and partly written. It lasted until the death of my great friend, to whom I am infinitely indebted.

If being called to Zurich in 1880 had prescribed my life as a social-democratic party writer, then this period also gave my scientific work the definitive stamp of a consistent Marxism freed from all eclectic attachments. Both my economic and historical works were henceforth written strictly according to the Marxist method.

My work for Höchberg's ventures did not last long. In the spring of 1882 a financial disaster forced him to restrict his outgoings substantially. His ventures came to an end. The exception was the *Social Democrat* in Zurich, which was able to survive without subsidies. I was dismissed and then returned to Vienna. No longer was I the inconclusive searcher from before. I now knew what I wanted. I had learned much and was now determined to establish my own publication.

Yet this did not happen that quickly, so in the meantime Heinrich Braun,[36] whom I had come to know along with H.E. Sax and Victor Adler[37] in Vienna, advised me to use the free time to finish my doctorate. I did not attach any great importance to this, especially since Engels had explained to me that, if I did not aspire to an academic career, then the work preparing the defence of my thesis would be a waste of time. Braun, however, claimed that the matter did not need to take up much time. I had just completed a study that could be used as a doctoral dissertation.

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35 Bebel 2013, pp. 136–43.

36 Heinrich Braun (23 November 1854 to 9 February 1927) edited a range of socialist publications and, following the German Revolution, became Prussian Minister for Agriculture. He studied at the University of Vienna, where he could have met Kautsky.

37 Victor Adler (24 June 1852 to 11 November 1918) was one of the most important figures in the early days of the workers' movement in Austria, working alongside Kautsky to write Austrian social democracy's Hainfeld Programme of 1889.

I had still not yet entirely abandoned my idea of a universal history. The preliminary work had shown me that I could not get by without knowledge of prehistory. I thus started studying it. Chance supported me in this. Höchberg had inclinations towards ethnology as well, if only because of his studies of ethics. His library contained a number of important works on history and ethnology.

When I went to London in 1881, I found Marx and Engels engaged in studies of prehistory, the fruits of which came in the form of the little book on the origin of the family, which was based on Marx's notes and published by Engels in 1884.[38] During my stay in London, it was none other than Bancroft's work on the Indians of western North America which Marx was studying (*Native Races of the Pacific States*, 1875),[39] whereas Engels drew my attention to Bachofen's *Mother-right*.[40] Strangely, neither of them mentioned Morgan's work *Ancient Society*,[41] which appeared in 1877 and which I was unable to find listed elsewhere either. At that point I was only familiar with his great work *Systems of Consanguinity* (1871).

The result of my work was a treatise on the origin of marriage and the family, which I completed in 1881/2 in Vienna. In places, this work arrived at different findings than Engels did later on, but I may note with satisfaction that later research vindicated me on the matters where Engels took a different view. Thus, I already rejected Morgan's adoption of the Punalua marriage as far back as 1882 and I think that I am the first to have understood the kinship terms on which Morgan based himself as designations of generation levels, not degrees of descent. Of course, I freely admit that some of what I assumed forty years ago has become outdated by recent research.

This work was to become my doctoral dissertation. Braun advised me to submit it as an anthropological study to Häckel[42] and to graduate in Jena.

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38 Engels 1941.

39 Hubert Howe Bancroft (5 May 1832 to 2 March 1918) was an American historian and ethnologist.

40 Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815–87) was a Swiss anthropologist associated with the theory of matriarchy or *Mutterrecht*, which postulates that motherhood is the source of human society. This idea had a powerful influence on Marx and Engels as well as on later Marxist thinkers.

41 Lewis Henry Morgan (21 November 1818 to 17 December 1881) was an anthropologist and Republican politician whose ethnography of the Iroquois in particular was groundbreaking. Marx and Engels read his work avidly.

42 Ernst Häckel (16 February 1834 to 9 August 1919) was a highly influential zoologist who helped spread the ideas of Darwinism in the German-speaking world. He established an atheist monism with many supporters and was amongst the first to argue that the principle

At first everything went as desired too. Häckel accepted the dissertation and agreed to be my examiner.

I immediately headed for Jena to get in touch with him. But I arrived too late. The summer holidays had started and Häckel had left Jena. Instead the dean of the Faculty of Philosophy (I forget his name) summoned me in order to inform me that it was unacceptable for Häckel to be my examiner. The work was a philological, not a scientific one, and my doctorate had to be in philology, he said. I replied that I could not do so, because I had not studied philology since secondary school. And even though I occasionally quoted Herodotus, Tacitus and other ancient authors, my work was of a purely ethnological nature and could only be assessed by a sociologist or an anthropologist. At any rate, of all the professors in Jena it was Häckel who was closest to the subject of the dissertation. The dean remained unconvinced and we parted on bad terms.

It struck me as hopeless to try and complete my doctorate in Jena under these circumstances. I forewent the doctorate definitely – all the more so because in the meantime the negotiations on the foundation of my journal had ended favourably. Engels, Liebknecht and Bebel became interested in it and in Dietz[43] we found a splendid publisher. For the rest of 1882, the preparation of my journal sufficiently occupied me to prevent any further plans for a doctorate. In the same year I published the unlucky doctoral dissertation as a series of articles in the Stuttgart-based *Cosmos*.[44] It has since ceased publication, but back then *Cosmos* was a very distinguished Darwinian monthly.

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of progress could be applied to historical analysis and socio-political developments, adding a distinctively aristocratic twist to the theory of evolution and the survival of the fittest.

43 Johann Heinrich Wilhem Dietz (3 October 1843 to 28 August 1922) was a pivotal figure in early social democracy, editing the Hamburg party paper, *Hamburger Altoaner Volksblatt*, from 1875. He was also a member of social democracy's parliamentary fraction in the Reichstag during the Anti-Socialist Laws. He founded the Dietz Verlag as a private enterprise in 1881. In 1901 it became the official property of the SPD and thereby the party publisher. There is an extensive discussion of the formative period of *Die Neue Zeit*, as well as Dietz's role in it, in Schelz-Brandenburg 1992, pp. 20–60.

44 This is actually a small typographical error on Kautsky's part – the journal was *Kosmos* not *Cosmos* (Kautsky 1882). According to Blumenberg, there exist Russian, Bulgarian and Latvian translations of the text, but it is still unavailable in English (Blumenberg 1960, p. 30).

V

The first issue of *Die Neue Zeit*,[45] a journal I edited until the autumn of 1917, appeared just before Marx's death in January 1883. I placed my monthly publication in Stuttgart at the service of Marxism, just as Bernstein was doing at same time with the *Social Democrat* in Zurich. The two journals differed in that Bernstein's was more political and more ruthless in tone, since it was published outside of the remit of the Anti-Socialist Laws, whereas mine had to be more cautious and adopted more of a theoretical character. But in general both were in complete agreement. Following the publications edited by Marx and Engels before and immediately after the 1848 revolution, ours were the first to serve consciously and systematically the propagation and further development of Marxist thought and research.[46] Only with these publications is it possible to speak of a Marxist school.

Of course, I tried to emphasise the specific character of Marx's conception of economics, history and socialism in the face of the socialist eclecticism I encountered. In so doing I soon became involved in polemics with several of my comrades. The first of these was in 1884, when I pointed out the differences that separated Marx from Rodbertus.[47] As a result, I came into conflict with

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45 *The New Age*, for Friedrich Adler the 'thread which linked together the socialists of all countries' and the 'intellectual centre of German socialism and international Marxism' (quoted in Kautsky (ed.) 1954, p. 55). Moira Donald notes that it 'played a multifaceted role during the formative period of Russian Marxism: it provided a highly-regarded information service for the activists in Russia, who would have otherwise been isolated from events and debates in the wider movement; it served as a platform for discussion of Russian affairs which the Russian Social Democratic press could not itself provide during this period, and it also ensured a wider audience for Kautsky's own work' (Donald 1993, p. 5). The German historian Till Schelz-Brandenburg notes that even though Lenin had never actually written for *Die Neue Zeit*, his study, which has been preserved through to today as a museum, boasts a complete collection of the journal (Schelz-Brandenburg n.d.).

46 Kautsky perhaps overstates things here in that many of the theoretical journals Marx was involved with were rather short-lived and unsuccessful. The exception, his *Die Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, was not a theoretical journal.

47 Karl Johann Rodbertus (12 August 1805 to 6 December 1875) was a German economist and *Kathedersozialist*. He championed Prussian *Junker* development along bourgeois lines, believing that the contradictions between labour and capital could be resolved through reforms carried out by the Prussian state. He maintained that all economic crises resulted from low national consumption. The work Kautsky refers to is Kautsky 1884a (cited in Blumenberg 1960, p. 34).

C.A. Schramm,[48] who back then was viewed as German social democracy's most respected economic theorist after Marx and Engels. The number of polemics in which I have become involved for the sake of Marxism since then is legion.

In addition, I set out to work systematically according to the method I had now acquired in economics and the research of history, or rather, according to Marx's method, increasingly to carry out both together – to look at the economy historically, and at history in terms of economics. A fruitful incentive for this activity came when I was able to move to London in 1885, as soon as the editorial work on my monthly was in progress. In constant interaction with Engels and amongst the treasures of the British Museum, working became a pleasure.

I had realised that Marxism represented a unification of the two currents of socialism which had been separated until the emergence of Marxist socialism. On the one hand, there was the elemental [*urwüchsig*][49] rebellion of the proletarians against the conditions oppressing them, which in many cases boiled down to a primitive communism of equality. On the other there was the rich economic critique of bourgeois society on the part of the scientifically

48 Carl August Schramm (11 March 1830 to 18 March 1905) was one of the first social-democratic opponents of Kautsky's efforts to popularise Marxism through the medium of *Die Neue Zeit*, defending Lassalle against 'the Marx cult' and 'the dogma of the Marxist school'. In a letter to Eduard Bernstein in November 1884, he wrote: 'The entire movement brought into being by Lassalle happened without Marx's involvement, but now we are making Marx into a prophet. You and Kautsky even portray his conception of history as a principle of German social democracy!' (Quoted in Gilcher-Holtey 1986, p. 38). The work Kautsky is referring to is Kautsky 1884b.

49 Most English-speaking readers will be familiar with the Russian translation of *urwüchsig*, as it appears in the famous Kautsky passage quoted by V.I. Lenin in his 1902 pamphlet, *What Is to Be Done?*: 'In this way, socialist awareness is something brought in to class struggle of the proletariat from without [*von außen Hineingetragenes*] and not something that emerges from the class struggle in *stikhiinyi* [elemental – BL] fashion [*urwüchsig*]. Correspondingly, the old Hainfeld programme [of Austrian social democracy written by Victor Adler and endorsed by Kautsky in 1889 – BL] said with complete justice that the task of social democracy is bringing to the proletariat (literally: filling the proletariat up with) the *awareness* of its position and the awareness of its task.' (Quoted in Lih 2006, p. 710.) *Urwüchsig* is often translated as 'elemental' or 'primitive'. This underlines how in this text Kautsky uses it to denote the working-class movement in its most elemental form: i.e., as the immediate conflict between worker and employer.

educated friends of humanity amongst the upper classes, a critique which, wherever it had positive things to say, boiled down to a utopian socialism.[50]

I was stirred to point out the disparity between these two sources of modern socialism in their origins by looking at the characters of two of their most significant representatives, Thomas More[51] and Thomas Münzer. My portrayal of the former's life appeared in 1888. I was not able to follow it up immediately with one of Münzer. For my studies soon showed me that the specific character of the movement he represented could not be detected with sufficient clarity from his story alone. I had to continue the study through from Münzer to the Anabaptists – and back beyond Münzer to a number of communist sects before him.

I had not quite completed the work when the centenary of the outbreak of the French Revolution gave me occasion to examine this event in a Marxist manner; that is to say, to investigate the class antagonisms which came to light within it and to show that a class is by no means the uniform structure it often appears in theory. Each of the classes of 1789 broke down into a number of subdivisions, each of which had its own specific interests which on occasion were in significant opposition to the overall interests of the class as a whole. The revolution cannot be understood without taking these subdivisions into account. The work appeared in 1889 under the title *The Class Antagonisms of 1789* and in later editions as *Class Antagonisms in the Age of the French Revolution*.[52]

In the same year, 1889, the Second International was founded and the May Day celebrations were agreed upon. In order to propagate both I published a booklet in 1890 entitled *Worker Protection, especially Worker Protection Laws Internationally and the Eight-Hour Day*.[53] It was the last book I published under the Anti-Socialist Laws, which fell in October 1890. Unfortunately, I had to leave London.

Dietz argued that it was now time to transform *Die Neue Zeit* into a weekly. This was not desirable to me, because I feared that it might become more political and less scientific. But Dietz viewed this transformation as the best way of expanding the number of our readers and thus our potential impact,

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50 This passage provides a pithy summation of what Lars T. Lih calls 'the merger formula' or 'the merger of socialism and the worker movement' common to both Kautsky and Lenin (Lih 2006, pp. 41–61).

51 Kautsky 1927.

52 The first edition is Kautsky 1889. The second edition is Kautsky 1908. For an interesting essay on Kautsky's contribution to the study of the French Revolution, see Nygaard 2009.

53 Kautsky 1890.

and I could not ignore this argument. Yet if the publication was to become more current and lively, then it was necessary for me to edit it from Germany. I therefore went to Stuttgart. The London-based *Social Democrat* ceased publication and Bernstein became a permanent correspondent for *Die Neue Zeit* from London.

The party had been reorganised following the Anti-Socialists Laws and also had to give itself a new programme. The party leadership presented the draft of such a programme to the Erfurt Congress of 1891. I had drawn up the theoretical section of another draft, the practical section of which came from Bernstein. Engels and Bebel preferred my proposal.[54] The programme commission for the Erfurt congress agreed with them. With a few additions, which were mainly taken from the party leadership's proposal, the party congress raised my draft to the status of party programme. I was commissioned to write a commentary on it. This appeared in 1892 under the title *The Erfurt Programme*.[55]

During the Anti-Socialist Laws, relations between German and Swiss social democracy had become particularly close. This probably explains why, following the fall of the Anti-Socialist Laws, the slogan of replacing parliamentary democracy with direct legislation became popular, a slogan rooted in the specific character of Switzerland. I stood against endeavours to make this slogan a general one in my 1893 book, *Parliamentarism, Popular Legislation and Social Democracy* (in later editions it was published under the shorter title of *Parliamentarism and Democracy*),[56] in which I set out why parliamentarism is indispensable to the modern state.

Between these works, I had finished my studies on Thomas Münzer, his predecessors and his successors. I published the results in 1894[57] in the book *Forerunners of Modern Socialism*. Generally speaking, for me the first decade of *Die Neue Zeit* was one of peaceful work, despite all of the polemics the publication brought with it. These had only been of an occasional nature and were considered to be merely individual differences of opinion. As much as

54 Helpfully, Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey has composed a chronological collection of the various drafts of the Erfurt programme in the Appendix to Gilcher-Holtey 1986. These drafts are translated for the first time in the Appendix to Lewis (forthcoming).

55 Translated into English under the title *The Class Struggle*. An abridged translation is available in Kautsky 1971.

56 Kautsky 1893.

57 This appears to be an error on Kautsky's part. The work was published in 1895. The work has not been translated in its entirety, but Kautsky 1897a covers communism during the Reformation.

tactical problems occupied us, the age of the Anti-Socialist Laws gave rise to an intense interest in theoretical discussion.

This changed when, following the collapse of these laws, there was greater freedom of expression in Germany and the rapid growth of the party brought with it a series of new elements into our ranks, considerably increasing the diversity of views. Pronounced differences soon appeared. These differences engulfed wider party circles and were not merely of a tactical nature but also matters of principle. As Engels had died in 1895 and Bernstein opposed me soon afterwards, I considered myself to have been abandoned by those who until then had been my role models and strongest supporters. In the revisionist crisis, the main job of fending off the revisionist critique fell to me.

VI

The revisionist movement was ushered in by a discussion of the agrarian question. Following the fall of the Anti-Socialist Laws, the rapid expansion of the party in the cities contrasted with its slow growth in the countryside, something which appeared all the more strange in that the competition of agricultural products from abroad and the fall in their prices had in some areas brought about great distress to agriculture. What should be our party's stance on this? This became a pressing matter. At that point, the vast majority of social democracy was still of the opinion that the triumphant advance of large enterprise was unstoppable both in industry and agriculture. Yet the conclusions drawn from this were by no means the same throughout the party.

At the Frankfurt Congress of 1894, Vollmar[58] and Schönlank[59] jointly moved a resolution demanding not only worker protection but also peasant protection. I, among others, opposed this resolution. I argued that we of course needed to stand up for the peasants as citizens, but we must not artificially support small enterprise.

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58 Georg von Vollmar (7 March 1850 to 30 June 1922) was a Bavarian social democrat and Reichstag deputy. His 1891 'Eldorado' speeches in the Munich public house of the same name are considered to foreshadow later revisionist trends in the party which, like Vollmar, favoured seeking alliances and cooperation with bourgeois parties by downplaying what he viewed as the SPD's 'radical utopianism'. Previously he had been a 'leftist' and general strike-ist.

59 Bruno Schönlank (16 May 1859 to 30 October 1901) was a social-democratic publicist who served 18 months in prison for publishing revolutionary literature during the Anti-Socialist Laws. He was a contributor to *Die Neue Zeit* and from 1894 until his death was the editor of the influential *Leipziger Volkszeitung*.

In addition, there was a third tendency, primarily represented by David,[60] which saw in the peasant family economy the highest form of agriculture and which aimed at breaking up and parcelling large enterprises.

At the Breslau Congress of 1895, the majority was on my side. Yet this was not the end of the matter for me. The problem of agricultural development occupied me most intensely and did not let go of me for a long time. I eventually came to the conclusion that David was right on one point: agricultural development is not proceeding in the direction of large enterprises forcing back small ones. This occurs only under certain circumstances. In other circumstances, we see the opposite process. Yet I did not go so far as David in seeing the peasant family economy as the agricultural ideal. In general, the relationship between large and small enterprises in agriculture changes only slightly. All the while I was convinced, and I remain so to this day, that with the same amount of labour, large enterprise, rationally carried out with scientific methods and furnished with the latest equipment, delivers greater returns than small enterprises, at least in the branches of production which serve mass production, especially in the production of grain. For me the drawback of large enterprise was to be found in the wages system.

I remained of the opinion that cooperative large enterprises will provide the best results and considered it the duty of a socialist regime to promote such enterprises. For the present, however, I was definitely convinced that the destruction of the large enterprises, their breaking-up into dwarf enterprises conducted without wage labour and merely with the labour-power available in the family, would signify a serious impairment to agricultural production and a critical paralysis of its technological progress. This is the conclusion I arrived at in the most comprehensive economic work I had written at that point, *The Agrarian Question*,[61] which was published in 1899. The second edition (1902) is long out of print. I have still not arranged for a new edition – not because I have changed my views but because a series of preconditions from which I proceeded back then no longer exist, or have even transformed into their opposite. I wrote during a period of declining food prices and land rents. But this trend came to a halt soon after my book was published and the opposite trend of rising prices and ground rents began to set in. The plight of the mass of the peasants thereby increasingly came to an end. But with this the antagonism

60 Eduard David (11 June 1863 to 24 December 1930) was a member of the right wing of social democracy from around this time onwards and later became an outspoken revisionist supporter of Bernstein.

61 Kautsky 1988.

between them and the urban classes intensified, the industrial workers above all.

In light of this new situation, a new edition would in some respects have meant a complete rewrite. At first, I could not find the time to do this, and the longer I waited, the more new facts and experiences accumulated, which would have to be taken into consideration. It strikes me as doubtful whether I will ever get around to modernising my *Agrarian Question*. As a provisional replacement, I published a booklet on the socialisation of agriculture in 1921.[62]

VII

When my book on the agrarian question appeared, the discussion on revisionism was already in full swing. And I had to rush immediately headlong into it. I did so without any real joy.[63] For in contrast to the debate on agriculture it did not offer me any new theoretical ideas or insights. I simply had to defend that which had been my conviction for quite some time and which a renewed, critical review could not undermine, but only reinforce. It is possible to distinguish between two aspects of the revisionist movement: a tactical and a theoretical one.

The tactics and the corresponding propaganda of the social-democratic parties in the major states of the European continent were attuned to the struggle against the military monarchy. They were based on memories from the time of the French Revolution and the upheavals of 1848. Our thought, our propaganda and our tactics were completely dominated by the idea of a political revolution as the essential precondition of the advance of socialism.

Since the amnesty for the refugees of the Paris Commune in 1880, and since the fall of the Anti-Socialist Laws in Germany in 1890, however, democratic conditions were present for propaganda and organisation, if not yet for winning power non-violently. This change could not but have an impact on our language and tactics. This was recognised in many party circles. Engels himself highlighted it in his last publication, the famous 'Introduction' to a reprint of Marx's *Class Struggles in France*.[64]

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62 Kautsky 1919a (cited in Blumenberg 1960, p. 104).

63 For an authoritative collection of various materials from the revisionist controversy, see Tudor and Tudor 1988. For the genesis of the revisionist dispute through the prism of Kautsky and Bernstein's correspondence, see Schelz-Brandenburg (ed.) 2003.

64 Engels 1975–2004b, pp. 506–25.

Even before this, I had also come to the conclusion that democracy would entail some changes to the forms of our activity, and openly explained this in an article for *Die Neue Zeit*. When, from autumn 1896 on, Bernstein began to subject several of our previous views to a critique in a series of articles under the general title of 'Problems of Socialism', I was at first extremely sympathetic. I saw his series as a continuation of what Engels and I had begun. But the more these articles went on in 1897 and 1898, the more worrying they appeared to me. I still hoped that these worries would be dispelled when Bernstein systematically summarised and explained his views in book form.[65] The opposite was the case. A passionate rejection of his views emerged from my initial worries.

To be sure, I had also been critical of some of the details of our tactics and propaganda and I too had found that, at least in terms of agriculture, the Marxist prognosis did not quite apply. Yet the longer I studied things, the stronger became my conviction that errors could be shown to exist in Marxist teaching only in individual results. The edifice as a whole, however, struck me as unshakeable. My work had increasingly tested the fruitfulness of the Marxist method and its points of departure – the theory of value and the materialist conception of history; I firmly rejected any eclecticism and learnt to reject any compromise – not when it came to practical politics, but certainly in theoretical work.

And then came Bernstein with a critique which did not reject Marxism in order to replace it with another, higher point of view – if he had succeeded in that, then I would admiringly have acknowledged such work. But for me his critique boiled down to declaring the foundations of Marxism to be inadequate and incorporating elements into it which struck me as incompatible with it. I vehemently opposed this revision of Marxism, which I regarded as theoretically compromised, as a relapse into the eclecticism which had fortunately been overcome. I did this all the more ardently as it was Bernstein who started this 'revision' – somebody who alongside Engels had contributed most to displacing my eclectic views with uniform, scientific ones and on whose help in championing and further developing these views I had counted more than ever since Engels's death.

Besides numerous polemical articles, I opposed Bernstein in the book *Bernstein and the Social-Democratic Programme* (1899),[66] a rejoinder to his *The Preconditions of Socialism*. He recently published a new edition of it. My

65 Available in English in Bernstein 1993.

66 Kautsky 1899. As of yet there is no English translation of this polemical intervention, but passages from it have been made available in English in Goode (ed.) 1983, pp. 15–32.

book is long out of print, but I have foregone reprinting it. Not because I would recognise that what I said there was wrong, but because since then I have had sufficient opportunity to develop my point of view positively and the book's polemical discussion would only tear open old wounds.

It is, of course, not up to me to decide who was right. Our tactical differences from that time were rendered obsolete after the revolution. It created an entirely new situation which gave the tactical problems a completely new complexion. Yet one can say this much about our theoretical differences: the decomposition of Marxism which was expected from them failed to materialise. On the contrary, Marx has gained tremendous significance not only in politics, but in scientific thought. Marx is already being treated like Kant: the most contradictory tendencies invoke him in order to claim the authority of his name for themselves. Only too often do those like us arrive at a situation where we can repeat the words Marx once expressed towards a disciple which was not as insightful as he was keen: 'If that is Marxism, then I'm not a Marxist'.

The later critics of Marx love to reproduce this quote in a way that has Marx say: 'I am not a Marxist', from which they conclude that anybody who wishes to work in the spirit of Marxism has to begin by ceasing to be a Marxist. So conceived, of course, the quote is completely meaningless – as meaningless as it would be if Kant had said that he was not a Kantian or Darwin that he was not a Darwinian.

VIII

As much I was occupied with revisionism, I did not become completely absorbed by it – even in the period of the most heated polemics. In 1897, I examined the importance of the consumer cooperatives,[67] opposing both exuberantly overestimating as well as underestimating them, something that had been quite strong in German social democracy since Lassalle. The result was the pamphlet *Consumer Cooperatives and the Workers' Movement*. The propagation of protectionism in our ranks, mainly by Max Schippel,[68]

67 Kautsky 1897b.

68 Max Schippel (6 December 1859 to 6 June 1928) was a revisionist member of the SPD parliamentary fraction. This was not the only polemic Kautsky conducted against Schippel. The two also clashed over the question of a popular militia, which was one of the Erfurt programme's minimum demands. In 1904, Kautsky also wrote an essay for *Die Neue Zeit*, entitled 'Wahlkreis und Partei [Electoral Constituency and Party]', in

prompted me in 1901 to write a work on *Trade Policy and Social Democracy*,[69] followed in 1907 by *Social Democracy and Colonial Policy*.[70]

Also published in connection with the revisionist movement, and also like the latter writings written in a non-polemical form, was the little book on *Ethics and the Materialist Conception of History*[71] from 1906, which opposed attempts to incorporate Kantian ethics into Marxism. Yet already before that my attention had above all been focused on a great event, the Russian Revolution. While for the most part the revisionists expected an imperceptible growth into socialism, I was increasingly filled with the conviction that revolution in Russia was at the door, and that this would also entail a political revolution in Austria and Germany.

In anticipation of this event, in 1902 I published *The Social Revolution*,[72] the 'travel guide for the state of the future', as Prince Bülow once called it in the Reichstag. In the winter of 1903/4, I explained in a series of articles[73] in *Die Neue Zeit* that we had to expect the outbreak of revolution in Russia imminently, a revolution which would be carried out by the proletariat but, given the immaturity of economic relations, would not yet be able to establish socialist production. It did not take long before the Russian Revolution really arrived.

I had correctly predicted it, but when it arrived I was actually wrong on one point: I overestimated its intensity and duration and thus the repercussions it could have for the West. It failed sooner than we had expected, so that its effects on Austria and Germany were less revolutionary than we had hoped. It nonetheless brought universal, equal suffrage to Austria and increased the vehemence of the struggle for suffrage in Prussia. Along with the arms race, the Russian Revolution created a stage of uncertainty in Europe which promised

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connection with the debate over whether Schippel could be removed from his Reichstag seat by the party against the opposition of his constituency.

69 Kautsky 1901 (cf. Blumenberg 1960, pp. 61–2).

70 Known in English as *Socialism and Colonial Policy* (Kautsky 1975).

71 Kautsky 1907.

72 Kautsky 1903.

73 One of these articles, a self-defence of his *The Social Revolution* entitled 'Revolutionary Questions', is translated in Day and Gaido (eds.) 2009, pp. 187–251. This volume also includes several of Kautsky's articles on revolutionary strategy in Russia. For more on Kautsky's significant impact on Eastern Europe see Lih 2006, pp. 74–101, and Donald 1993. For his reception in South-Eastern Europe, see Haupt 1986, pp. 48–81.

to bring about the most unexpected catastrophes. I explained this in the 1909 book *The Road to Power*.[74]

At this time, the struggle against revisionism had completely subsided. But now I was involved in a struggle with the opposite camp. I had indeed expected the revolution, but according to my Marxist persuasion it was an elemental event, the arrival of which could not be sped up any more than it could be put off. When I pointed to its arrival, I did so in order to deduce from it the necessity of organising and training the ranks of the proletariat so that it could prove up to the difficult tasks which awaited it. Yet in its passionate struggles the Russian Revolution had unleashed an impatience, an outlook for which my standpoint was condemning the movement to a waiting devoid of action. The new weapon of the mass strike, which in 1905 in Russia had achieved such great effects, appeared to them to be the sovereign means of forcing the revolution. This group, mainly represented by Rosa Luxemburg and her friends Karl Liebknecht, Georg Ledebour[75] and Paul Lensch,[76] turned against Bebel and me. Because of this, I fought sharp polemics with Luxemburg and Lensch. These polemics prompted me to write *The Political Mass Strike*,[77] published in spring 1914, in which I examined the conditions for the mass strike as well as its significance and limits.

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74 Kautsky 1909. Following the outbreak of World War I and the SPD parliamentary fraction's approval of war credits, Lenin implored his comrade Alexander Shliapnikov to 'obtain without fail and reread (or ask to have it translated for you) *Road to Power* by Kautsky [and see] what he writes there about the revolution of our time! And now, how he acts the toady and disavows all that!' (quoted in Lih 2014a, p. 6). The Menshevik historian and archivist Boris Nicolaevsky notes that, owing to the stringent anti-democratic restrictions of the Stolypin period and World War I, it was impossible to publish a Russian translation of the book until 1917 (Kautsky (ed.) 1954, p. 96).

75 Georg Ledebour (7 March 1850 to 31 March 1947) was an SPD Reichstag deputy. He was a pre-war radical, a centrist during the war, and hostile to the Bolsheviks and the Spartacists. He was a member of the USPD in 1917 and its Berlin organisation in 1918, leading the circle of revolutionary shop stewards. He was the co-chair of the revolutionary committee in January 1919 and charged with high treason. He broke with the USPD left at the Halle Congress in 1920 on the question of joining the Comintern.

76 Paul Lensch (31 March 1873 to 18 November 1926) was an SPD journalist and Reichstag deputy. One of the 'lefts' in the pre-war SPD, at the meeting of the parliamentary fraction on August 3 he was opposed to approving war credits, but soon broke with his former leftism and became an outspoken advocate of a German victory in the war alongside others in what became known as the *Die Glocke* group after its publication of the same name. See Macnair 2014 for a discussion of the politics of this organisation.

77 Kautsky 1914a.

In addition to these political, topical works, the decade of passionate political animation before the war also brought some purely theoretical tasks my way. Following Engels's death, Marx's daughter Eleanor had intended to publish her father's estate with my help. When she herself died prematurely, Laura, his last living daughter at the time, requested that I take over this job. I advised her to hand over to Mehring[78] the parts of the estate which fell more into the field of party history and took over the economic parts myself. I published several economic treatises from the estate in *Die Neue Zeit*. I included one particularly important treatise as an introduction to a new edition of the *Critique of Political Economy*.

However, my main task was to publish *The Theories of Surplus Value*, the first volume of which appeared in 1905 and the last in 1910.[79] Besides the fact that the manuscript was incomplete, Marx's handwriting alone made the work very laborious. But the results struck me as very much worth the effort. In this context Marx's letters to Kugelmann[80] should also be mentioned, which I published in the twentieth volume of *Die Neue Zeit* in 1902. These were also joined by a popular edition of *Capital* Volume I, which I completed in 1913.[81]

Besides these editorial activities, two other larger, non-political works occupied me in the decade before the war. The issue of whether light could be shed on the origins of Christianity using the method of historical materialism was one of the first which had occupied me after I had come to accept that method. Inspired by reading Bruno Bauer,[82] I had published a series of articles in *Die Neue Zeit* on the origins of Christianity as far back as 1885. Münzer's movement, and the role which early Christian traditions had played within it, had once again drawn me to the topic. Some brief comments I had made about early Christianity in my introduction to the *Forerunners* had brought forth

78 Franz Mehring (27 February 1846 to 28 January 1919) wrote a four-volume history of German social democracy (Mehring 1960) and thus would have found this material interesting. He originally wrote such a history in 1877 for his doctoral dissertation from the standpoint of a hostile liberal, but later updated and revised the material. This episode was later dug up by the 'revisionists' in the party so as to discredit him (see Frölich 2013, pp. 36–43). There still exists no English-language translation of this important work.

79 Marx 1975–2004a; Marx 1975–2004b; Marx 1975–2004c.

80 Marx's letters to Ludwig Kugelmann were published as twelve separate contributions to *Die Neue Zeit* in 1902.

81 According to Werner Blumenberg (Blumenberg 1960, p. 93) this was actually published, along with an introduction by Kautsky, in 1914: Kautsky 1914b.

82 Bruno Bauer (6 September 1809 to 13 April 1882) was a Left-Hegelian philosopher and historian who wrote extensively on the New Testament and the origins of Christianity, such as in Bauer 1998.

lively opposition. When it became necessary to publish a new edition of my *Forerunners*, this prompted me to carry on my previous studies on the beginnings of Christianity. The outcome was the book *Foundations of Christianity*,[83] which was published in 1908. A work of a different nature became necessary in that I was repeatedly asked whether I still held the same view on the population question which I had outlined in my first work. It was not possible to answer in two words, and the answer needed explaining. I provided the answer in my 1910 book, *Reproduction and Development in Nature and Society*.[84] In nature, the fertility of each organism adapts to its living conditions. In its lifetime, it produces on average the same number of offspring as those who die off during the same period. A species which produces less offspring will soon die out and a species which produces more will soon exhaust its scope of sustenance. Neither species is able to maintain itself.

This is the law of population in the natural world, which I opposed to Malthus's arithmetic and geometric progression. As soon as the soil – the plants' scope of sustenance – is taken up by the number of plants to which it is suited, is no longer capable of expansion and the consumption needs of herbivorous animals are unable to continue to expand either. This also defines the carnivores' scope of sustenance. It is also incapable of further expansion. Thus in nature we do not see the constant expansion of the scope of sustenance and the even more rapid desire for expansion on the part of the organisms living from them, but a constant balance between all of the organisms.

Human beings and their technology disturb this balance. They create new conditions of life which either increase or decrease their fruitfulness. They are thus able to extend their scope of sustenance, but not at all times and only in certain circumstances. This can result in the most diverse population laws. Under certain conditions, the population can grow faster than the scope of sustenance, causing misery, exodus and war. Under other conditions, the population will decrease, while their mode of production demands that it increase in size. Here society can degenerate, the community can eventually perish and the human race can become extinct. Each society has its own particular population law. In the beginnings of industrial, capitalist society, the fear of overpopulation is predominant, yet the fear of depopulation has increasingly asserted itself for decades. We do not know what the population law of socialist society will be. Yet we do not have the slightest reason to fear that it will perish as a result of overpopulation. Until now high intellectual

83 Kautsky 2007.

84 Kautsky 1910.

culture was not propitious to proliferation, whether it reduced natural fertility or promoted the use of artificial prevention.

This view is certainly different from the one I arrived at in 1878. Yet my current point of view is as far removed from the original teleological anti-Malthusianism as my original one was. The book dealt with a border area between natural and social science. This area had interested me ever since I began to think about economics and society. Alongside the need to revise my original view on the population question, I was led to this border area by the agitation of the racial theorists, who had influenced the social thought of our time. My engagement with them brought forth the work *Are the Jews a Race?*[85] At first this book went under in the rage of World War I, the beginnings of which it blundered into.

IX

This war, which shook the entire world, threw crowns into the sand and shattered empires, bringing about a fundamental upheaval in my affairs and everybody else's in Germany.

Social democracy as a whole had been united in its striving to prevent war. Yet when the war broke out in spite of this resistance, it split over the fateful question of whether or not to back its national governments during the war, even if it considered the governments' policies to be disastrous. The vast majority approved the war credits, a small minority opposed them. I adopted a middle position in line with that taken by Bebel and Liebknecht in 1870, when they abstained from voting, seeking to place themselves neither on the side of the Prussian king nor on the side of the French emperor.

If the objections to my approach were correct, namely that it was no longer possible for a party as large as German social democracy to abstain, then I demanded that the war credits should not be unconditionally rejected or approved. My view was that social democracy may only approve a government's war credits if the latter ceremoniously committed itself in public to conduct the war merely for purposes of defence with the aim of ending the conflict as quickly as possible through a peace of understanding without annexations, reparations or territorial violations.

In times that are as passionately stirred as those of war or revolution, it is a matter of choosing this side or the other. Thus I was almost entirely alone in my middle position. And this did not change throughout the war or even

85 Kautsky 1926.

long after it. In the forty years from the beginning of my party career until the outbreak of war, I had always agreed with the majority of that party, whereas its critics on its left and right only made up a small minority. Now, however, I found myself in opposition to the great majority without satisfying the minority. The extreme left led by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, known as the Spartacists during the war, had already fought me before 1914, but they now did so with twice the severity. This did not fail to have an effect on the more moderate section of the opposition. This section continued to respect me, but not without various concerns.

At that time, I came into close contact with Bernstein. In the war, our paths crossed again. Each of us retained his own particular theoretical nature, but we now almost always agreed on our practical actions. And so it has remained to this day.

Naturally, my literary activity during the war was strongly suppressed by the military censor. My main efforts were aimed at preparing a reasonable peace. In 1915 I published *Nation State, Imperialist State and Confederation*,[86] in which I defended the need to respect national self-determination when drawing up peace treatises and took the field against the view enthusiastically championed by both the right and the left at the time – by Cunow[87] and [Karl] Radek – namely that the imperialist-conquest state had become necessary due to the needs of the economy, and would persist as long as capitalism did.

The book was plagued by the military censor to such an extent that it never found any interest amongst the public. I had more luck with the books *The United States of Central Europe* (1916),[88] *Serbia and Belgium*[89] and *Alsace*

86 Translated in Day and Gaido (eds.) 2011, pp. 791–849.

87 Heinrich Cunow (11 April 1862 to 20 August 1936) was a leading SPD intellectual and prominent member of the anti-revisionist wing of the party. He was a member of the *Vorwärts* editorial board and taught at the SPD party school alongside Rosa Luxemburg and Franz Mehring. In the early days of World War I, however, he started to draw 'German victory' conclusions similar those of Lensch, Parvus and others, arguing that: 'As soon as England entered the war, it acquired a quite different status' (quoted in Sigel 1976, p. 22). While on occasion his belligerent stance was slightly embarrassing to the SPD leadership, it could also be useful, such as when he could be called upon as a reliable replacement for Kautsky as editor of *Die Neue Zeit* in 1917, following the latter's oppositional stance to the war and the SPD leadership.

88 Kautsky 1916a.

89 Kautsky 1917a.

Lorraine[90] (both 1917) and finally *The Emancipation of Nations* (1918).[91] By contrast, immediately before the war came to an end I once again encountered the fierce resistance of the military censor. The censor was concerned about the proof I provided to show that the war economy meant nothing other than the beginning of a socialist economy. I thus had to have my essay on *War Marxism*[92] published in Vienna in April 1918. Even before this, some of my works had to seek refuge there on occasion.

The longer the war lasted, the more keenly I was occupied with the matter of how to return from the quite abnormal conditions of the war economy to a normal peacetime economy without any major crises. Strangely, the military censor greatly held me back in this. I was unable to publish an article on the 'Economic Aspect of the War of Exhaustion' in Germany. I had to go to Vienna with it, where it appeared without any objections in *Der Kampf*[93] of September 1916.

In March 1918, I completed a work on the transitional economy.[94] I assumed that peace would soon have to come and considered it necessary that, before it came and placed before us the problem of a transition to a peacetime economy, we would have to consider this question from all angles. This was the purpose of my book. But the military censor repeatedly delayed its publication. It was ready to be printed in July, but only on 6 November was I able to write the preface to mark its publication. This publication then fell through during the first weeks of the revolution, when we were concerned with quite different problems to those discussed in the book. Some of its chapters have only since become topical, such as the chapter on money, which makes up a third of the book. Yet how harmless this problem appeared in 1918!

Meanwhile, my isolation in the party had deepened. The antagonism within the party towards the majority had become so trenchant that in 1917 there was an open split.[95] I considered the split to be disastrous and did my best to oppose it. This did not improve my position in relation to the majority of the new 'Independent Social Democracy', but at the same time the split itself

90 Kautsky 1917b.

91 According to Werner Blumenberg, this book was published in 1917, not 1918 (Blumenberg 1960, p. 99): Kautsky 1917c.

92 Kautsky 1918a (cf. Blumenberg 1960, p. 102).

93 Kautsky 1916b (cf. Blumenberg 1960, p. 97).

94 Kautsky 1918b (cf. Blumenberg 1960, p. 102).

95 This is not entirely accurate: 33 oppositional deputies were expelled from the SPD parliamentary fraction in March 1916, when Haase spoke out against the renewal of the state of siege. By January 1917 they were out of the party as well, with the USPD being formed in April 1917.

deepened the gulf between the old party and me, so that eventually, in October 1917, the party leadership removed me from the editorial board of *Die Neue Zeit*. Dietz and I had set it up as a private publication, as under the Anti-Socialist Laws it was impossible to do otherwise. But following the fall of the latter the relationship between *Die Neue Zeit* and the party had become increasingly close, so that in 1901 we thought it appropriate to make it the official property of the party. From then on, my editorial work was responsible to the party. So it was that I could be removed in 1917. This forced separation from my place of work which I had created, where I concentrated my life work for a generation and through which I had worked alongside the greatest minds of socialism at that that time on a publication I had shaped hit me even harder in that it coincided with my extensive isolation.

This isolation was reinforced by the rise of Bolshevism. I had ignored the attacks of the Spartacists as much as possible. Polemics against oppositional elements under the pressure of the military censor struck me as inappropriate. Yet things were different when in Russia the Bolsheviks seized state power, broke up the Constituent Assembly and set in motion a system of terrorism against any non-Communists so as not to have to share this state power with other socialist parties. They did all this in the expectation that they could thereby, with one blow,[96] transform the whole of Russia into a completely Communist commonwealth.

As soon as I could see with some degree of clarity what was going on in Russia following the October Revolution of 1917, I considered it my duty to stand against it, as well as against the belief that such a backward country like Russia could lead the way on the path to socialism for the industrial West. I also stood against the madness that socialism could be built up with a few forceful blows, and by a privileged minority at that, in opposition to the great majority of the people, which it had to keep in check with terror and the force of arms.

In the summer of 1918, I published my first book against Bolshevism, *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*,[97] which was followed by *Terrorism and Communism*[98] in 1919 and *From Democracy to State Slavery*[99] in 1921.

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96 By contrast, when writing in defence of the Russian Revolution in 1921, Clara Zetkin notes that: '[the proletariat] cannot fly out of the hell of capitalism into the Communist paradise with a single, aspirant and powerful flap of its wings' (Zetkin 1921, p. 42).

97 Kautsky 1919b.

98 Kautsky 1920a.

99 Kautsky 1921a. It has yet to be translated into English. For a discussion of Kautsky's views in this text against the backdrop of his earlier writings on Russia, see Day and Gaido (eds.) 2009, pp. 54–8.

It is self-evident that my resolute stance against Bolshevism embittered the Spartacists, who since the Revolution called themselves Communists. But many of the Independent Social Democrats also turned against me. Even those who admitted that I was correct thought that, in the situation as it was back then, an attack against Bolshevism was synonymous with harming the Russian Revolution; in other words, that it was untimely at the very least.

My very first publication against Bolshevism produced such concerns against me amongst some of my best friends. This did not get any better following the revolution which broke out in November 1918.

X

When the war came to an end, for me all of the deeper differences between the Majority Social Democrats and the Independent Social Democrats did too. And the tasks of the revolution could only be solved with complete unity between the socialists. In my eyes, uniting them now became an urgent necessity.

But in 1918 the contradictions which had arisen from differing views during the war, and which lasted after it, were joined by those which had emerged from Bolshevism. Instead of unity, therefore, after November 1918 there was increased discord, because now in the ranks of the socialists there were struggles between the various organisations for power, proceeding from the Communists, for whom the Bolshevik coup of 1917 was a model. Thus social democracy was unable to take what it had been possible to take from the revolution in the situation as it was back then.

With great effort and difficulty, after 9 November there was cooperation between the Majority Socialists and the Independents. The People's Commissars[100] entrusted me with the office of Deputy to the Secretary of State in the Foreign Office. The Secretary of State Solf,[101] to whom I was attached, was

100 The 'People's Commissars' formed the interim government following the fall of the Kaiser in November 1918. There were three commissars from the 'Majority Socialists' of the SPD (Friedrich Ebert, Philipp Scheidemann and Otto Landsberg) and three from the 'Independent Socialists' of the USPD (Hugo Haase, Wilhelm Dittmann and Emil Barth).

101 Wilhelm Solf (5 October 1862 to 6 February 1936) was a diplomat and statesmen who, among other things, had served as the first Governor of German Samoa and played a part in the negotiations for the armistice of 11 November 1918. He was extremely unpopular amongst the German working class and his presence as Foreign Minister in the 'all-socialist government' in 1918 was an obvious thorn in the side of its 'revolutionary' credentials.

only a temporary solution. When he was succeeded by Brockdorff Rantzau,[102] I found that there was a full willingness to cooperate on the part of the latter. But no sooner was he in office than the Independents argued they could no longer work together with the Majority Socialists. They left the government and with this my work in the Foreign Office also came to an end before it had really begun. The only outcome of this activity was my gathering of documents on the outbreak of the war, which I had begun with the approval of the People's Commissars and completed with the approval of subsequent governments. In the autumn of 1919, professor Schücking[103] and Count Montgelas[104] were given the task of publishing the collection in association with me under the title *The German Documents on the Outbreak of War* (four volumes).[105]

The work also prompted me to make a foray into the field of diplomacy in a commentary entitled *How the World War Arose*.[106] I soon added an appendix to it. Its title alone ('Delbrück and Wilhelm II') made clear that I objected to the criticisms of the great historian of war. However, the revolution did not only send me to the Foreign Office. It almost sent me to work in a university environment. The Independents' People's Commissars asked me whether I wanted to take on a professorship at the University of Berlin, just like Cunow and Lensch, who at that point had been promoted to professorship by the SPD Commissars. They would have also accepted my professorship. I turned down their offer because I lacked the inclination to work at a teaching post and maybe even the skills to do so as well. It was for the same reason that I also

102 Count Ulrich von Brockdorff Rantzau (29 May 1869 to 8 September 1928) was an ambassador and diplomat who played a key role in organising the passage of the famous sealed train in which Lenin and Karl Radek returned to Russia in 1917. He championed stern measures against radical leftists both at home and abroad. He led the German delegation to negotiate the Treaty of Versailles.

103 Walter Schücking (6 January 1875 to 25 August 1935) was also involved in the negotiations around the Treaty of Versailles.

104 Count Max von Montgelas (1860–1938) was a Bavarian army general and diplomat who helped to draft Germany's response to charges of war guilt from the Entente powers. He was the official spokesman for the Weimar Republic at the Paris Peace Conference.

105 Kautsky, Monteglas and Schücking (eds.) 1924.

106 Kautsky 1920a.

turned down Eisner,[107] who back then wanted to bring me to the University of Munich to replace the outgoing Brentano.[108]

Yet I did not evade another appointment offered to me, namely to the socialisation commission. As a socialist government, the People's Commissars of course felt obliged to consider the matter of socialisation. Yet the Majority socialists were not Bolsheviks, and nor were the Independents. They knew full well that aimless, hasty socialisation could only have disastrous effects. They convened a socialisation commission, on which not only socialists sat but also representatives of other outlooks, both scholars and practical people. The commission was supposed to investigate which branches of production were ripe for socialisation and which methods of socialisation best corresponded to the specific character of each branch. The commission did me the honour of electing me as its chairman.

This election somewhat reminded me of that of Louis Blanc, whom in 1848 the revolutionary government had appointed chairman of the Government Labour Commission, which met in Luxembourg. At that point, I asked myself: will our commission end up as unsuccessful as that in Luxembourg, to be replaced by a June battle?[109]

This time things were so not as bad. German social democracy is still the largest party in Germany. Yet the elections in January 1919 did not return a majority for the party and it is my conviction that socialism cannot be brought about through the coercion of the majority by the minority. Only the joyful and energetic cooperation of the majority of the population can create a socialist mode of production superior to the capitalist mode.

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107 Kurt Eisner (14 May 1878 to 21 February 1919) was an editor of *Vorwärts* in 1898, working as a literary critic. He was a revisionist and was removed from the editorial board in the clash between the left and right in 1905. In 1914 he opposed war on pacifist grounds, joining the USPD split in 1917. He organised a network of delegates in Munich factories and was sentenced to eight months in jail after the strikes of January 1918. The leader of the Bavarian revolution in November and new prime minister of Bavaria, he was assassinated on 21 February 1919.

108 Lujo Brentano (18 December 1844 to 9 September 1931) was a German economist and *Kathedersozialist* academic who taught economics at the University of Munich between 1891 and 1914. In 1914 he signed the notorious *Manifesto of the 93* – a statement from leading academics and thinkers declaring their unequivocal support for the German war effort. He served as People's Commissar for Trade in Eisner's Munich government, but lasted only a few days in this post.

109 This refers to the unsuccessful popular uprising of the June Days, which began on 23 June 1848.

The outcome of the January elections deprived the socialisation commission of a basis for effective intervention in the economy. Yet its work was not in vain. Following extensive inquiries, it drew up practical proposals for a series of important branches of production, above all for coal-mining, which will receive vitality as soon as a socialist majority emerges from the nation's ballot boxes.[110]

The failure in January was not least attributable to the uprising that had initially erupted in the beginning of that month in Berlin against the social-democratic government. The worst consequences were to be feared, whether this rebellion was successful or whether it was bloodily suppressed. Thus back then I found myself amongst those who sought to mediate between the government and the insurrectionists. At that point too, the conditions for a mediating role were absent. Our efforts proved unsuccessful. There was a bloody crackdown and along with this came the disastrous consequence that had been feared, a most profound rupture in the German workers' movement.

It struck me as impossible to then join the victor, the Majority Social Democrats. On the other hand, following the unrest of January and March a growing section of the Independents was converging with the Communists. The party left the Second International at its Leipzig Congress of November 1919. It considered affiliating to the Third International. At that time my isolation in the party probably reached its zenith. I considered turning my back on German social democracy and moving to Vienna, where I would find a united party. It was in Vienna that I published my 1920 book on the past and future of the International,[111] in which I came to the conclusion that if efforts to destroy the Second International were successful then the new one which would take its place would not look any different to the previous one anyway.

Before I could move to Vienna, I accepted in August 1920 an invitation from the Georgian government to go and visit that country. I was excited to get to know this unique state formation, where on an overwhelmingly agricultural basis a purely social-democratic government ruled successfully with

110 Quotes such as these are often cited in order to bolster the prevalent consensus that Kautsky was a purely parliamentarian thinker who suffered from the illusion of 'parliamentary cretinism'. Nonetheless, it should be recalled that these words were written in *1924* – that is to say, long after Kautsky had become the *renegade* Kautsky – and that statements such as this are in flagrant contradiction to some of the ideas Kautsky developed on political strategy earlier on in his career. For more on what I contend is a shift within Kautsky's ideas on democracy, see Lewis 2011. Some of his most important earlier writings on democracy are translated for the first time in Lewis (forthcoming).

111 Kautsky 1920c.

democratic methods, with the consent of the great majority of the population and without having to renounce any of its socialist principles. That was quite a paradoxical phenomenon which was worthy of closer study. The result of my three-month stay in Georgia was my book *Georgia: A Social-Democratic Peasant Republic* (Vienna 1921).[112]

The Georgian method struck me as a model for those areas of the East where a modern, metropolitan, well-organised and educated proletariat represented the strongest force amongst the politically and economically trained classes, with the result that proletarian rule is unavoidable, but given the backwardness of industry and the prevalence of small peasant enterprises an all-round socialism is impossible. Unfortunately the Bolshevik invasion, which occurred six weeks after my departure from Tiflis, crushed this promising flower before it was able to blossom.

When I returned from Georgia, I found German social democracy to be in a completely new situation. The Halle Congress of October 1920[113] had seen a split in the Independent Social Democracy. One wing had joined the Communists. The other had refused to do so and came into conflict with the other wing, a conflict which was increasingly coming to a head. At the same time, political relations in Germany had straightened out to such an extent that for any thinking socialist the road to be taken was clear. Even the only remaining disputed question of whether to participate in a coalition government gradually lost its divisive force. The two great currents of the social-democratic workers' movement in Germany increasingly flowed parallel to each other in the same direction, and it was only a matter of time before they would flow in the same river bed again.

Conditions were now such that it was possible to take up the fight for socialist unification successfully. All my intentions to leave Germany then vanished. I took part in the movement for unification with all my might. I hoped to promote it as best I could by drawing the conclusions from the revolution. I investigated the extent to which its lessons had caused us to change or to add to the image of socialism we had made for ourselves in our experience in the two decades before the war. In paving the way for a new programme corresponding to our new insights, I hoped to create a common ground between both of the social-democratic parties. Thus my most recent book *The Proletarian Revolution and its Programme* came into existence.

112 Kautsky 1921b.

113 For English translations of two of the key speeches at this Congress, as well as some background, see Lewis and Lih (eds.) 2011.

Hardly had it appeared, in June 1922, when we heard the unfortunate shots which did for Walter Rathenau.[114] Although he was no social democrat, his blood nonetheless became the glue which cemented the two parts of social democracy together again. A few months later, the unification was complete.

I saw proof of the fact that this unification was not merely organisational in nature but also one based on ideas and on the full compliance of the thinking of the masses in that most parts of my book were approvingly absorbed by the party press of both tendencies. There was only one exception – only one party publication in the united party was hostile to me: its scientific publication, *Die Neue Zeit*, which until 1917 had formed no small part of my life work. A strange irony of history, but one which by no means had a tragic effect on me in light of the tremendous change in my situation, which within a year had changed from the greatest isolation into its exact opposite. I had never lost the respect, sympathy and confidence of my party friends, even when our differences were at their sharpest. But now I had also finally won their general approval once more, perhaps to a greater extent than before the war.

Unless the consequences of the Ruhr catastrophe[115] put a spoke in the wheel, following all the trials and tribulations since 1914 my final years thus promise to reach a reconciliatory conclusion. It is not up to me to decide whether my life work has served social progress, whether it has gone in the right direction. Yet I must say that for the last fifty years of my life, since I embarked on the particular direction I did, I have never gone astray. I had to bury several illusions, recognise and correct several errors and until recently my views had to go through several developments. But every new insight only served to convince me further of the correctness of the direction I had embarked on and of the method I was applying.

So I will die as I have lived, an incorrigible Marxist.

Translated by Ben Lewis

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114 Walther Rathenau (29 September 1867 to 24 June 1922) was a prominent German industrialist and liberal Foreign Minister who signed the 1922 Treaty of Rapallo with Russia, where both sides renounced any territorial or financial claims against each other in the aftermath of World War I. He was assassinated by the German far-right after being in office for less than six months.

115 This refers to France's military occupation of the industrial Ruhr region of Germany in January 1923 after the latter had defaulted on its onerous war reparations to the victorious Entente powers.

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