Third Roads and Third Ways in Social Democracy:
Reconciling Tensions in European Left Debates, 1848–1934

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Tristan Vaughan Ewins
Tristan V Ewins, BA (Hons), La Trobe, Grad Dip. Ed., Monash

School of Global Urban and Social Studies
College of Design and Social Context
RMIT University

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis/project is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Tristan Vaughan Ewins

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ABSTRACT

During the period 1848 to 1934 a number of theorists and intellectual movements stand out as political discourses and practices that might be termed, ‘Third Roads’ or ‘Third Ways’. These theorists include Ferdinand Lassalle, Eduard Bernstein, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Kautsky and the Austro-Marxists. However, almost no scholarly work has been undertaken to understand these theorists in relation to each other, as either Third Roads or Third Ways. More broadly, the study of Lassalle, Kautsky and the Austro-Marxists is especially rare; and what study there is of Kautsky in particular tends to adhere to the (overwhelmingly negative) Bolshevist perspective. In this thesis, Third Roads and Third Ways are understood as emerging in relation to the ‘First Way’, of hegemonic capitalism and an evolving ‘Second Way’ comprising the relatively hegemonic left-revolutionary discourses of their time. In other words, these approaches developed firstly in relation to each other and, secondly around a series of contentious themes, including, for example, voluntarism/determinism, principle/pragmatism, and conflict/conciliation.

Generally speaking, Third Roads share the same goals as the relative Second Way, but Third Ways project a different end-goal. For example, it could be said that with Stalinism arising as the hegemonic left-revolutionary discourse (i.e., the Second Way during its time), its real-world objectives were no longer compatible with those that had been adhered to, say, by the likes of Luxemburg. Luxemburg’s position could be conceived as a Third Road before Stalinism, with the ascent of Stalin her position might otherwise be interpreted as having been a more distinct Third Way. The relative standing of Kautsky and of the Austro-Marxists is likewise affected.

This thesis suggests that it is precisely through the ways in which they deal with contested themes that Third Way and Third Road theorists offer a potentially important legacy in our thinking about political contestation. Therefore, one of the central questions of this thesis concerns what responses to different contested ideological themes can provide a basis for arguing that Third Way and Third Road approaches have defensible political and theoretical legacies.

All of the Third Road and Third Way theorists considered here have contributed important legacies with regard to their theoretical innovations and insights – and often in response to the contested themes as noted above – but also with regard to practical contributions to the development of socialist traditions that hitherto have been largely overlooked. They have made important contributions both as political actors and as social theorists. This they have done both in the context of their activism, in their time, and also in the more lasting legacy they have left as a consequence for their many and varied practical and theoretical insights.
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Some mainstream opinions on Marxism commonly suggest that it is a discredited and totalitarian ideology, responsible for some of the most repressive and murderous regimes the world has known. Confusingly, such assumptions are accompanied by situating Marxism on one side of supposedly diametrically opposed frameworks – for example, of principles of collectivism/equality versus freedom/inequality. Thus the term ‘communism’ commonly is associated with a model of centralized planning which was inflexible and unresponsive to consumers’ needs. Social democracy, by comparison is considered a more moderate alternative on the relative centre-left of the Western political spectrum, which accepts market relations and which has relegated Marxian analyses of exploitation, surplus value and class struggle to the dustbin of history. The most influential modern interpretation of social democracy is the specific Giddensesque Third Way, which substitutes inclusion in place of equality and redistribution. Furthermore, the assumption underlying much ‘modern’ liberal and social democracy is that history has made its judgement, that the ‘good guys’ (i.e., liberal capitalism as the exemplar case) ‘won’ and that new global struggles will exclude the democratic class struggle, focusing instead on cosmopolitan-globalized-liberal capitalism in opposition to qualitatively different new opponents – for instance, radical, militant Islam.

The subject of this thesis is significant in that it sets out to refute misassumptions concerning what might be referred to as ‘radical social democracy’. This is approached through positing and interrogating what will be called ‘relative Third Roads and Third Ways’ (Lassalle, Centrism, Revisionism, Luxemburgian ‘leftism’, Austro-Marxism). Unlike the modern-day Giddensesque Third Way, these examples comprise alternative interpretations of socialism or alternative routes to socialism. The fact of the differing nature of these across the 1848–1934 period and today also illustrates the relative nature of the concepts involved. Definitions of Third Roads and Third Ways are elaborated on subsequently in this chapter.

Interrogating and tracing the contributions of the radical social democrats is important at a number of levels. There are the many insights to be gained through a re-engagement with, and re-conceptualization of radical social democracy. The separation of the Left into communist and social-democratic camps needs to be traced, and also questioned, in order to retrieve the insights of thinkers such as Bernstein, Kautsky, Luxemburg, Otto Bauer and others. Lassalle is interesting also as
a precursor to later German social democracy. Indeed, he was important in its early and foundational Development; and his work remained influential in Germany into the early 20th century despite his premature death.

The central means that I use in order to trace the insights and contributions of such thinkers is analysis of their responses to a wide variety of contested ideological themes, and it includes attempts to mediate, negotiate and reconcile those themes. The challenge of discerning a defensible legacy from the attempts of various relative Third Roads and Third Ways in their mediation of contested themes is the main problem for this thesis. For example, there are the themes of authoritarianism versus freedom and of voluntarism versus determinism. It is in the context of interrogating such themes that I demonstrate the defensible political-theoretical legacy of Third Roads and Third Ways during the 1848-1934 period.

To take one example, teleological assumptions of inevitable progress towards socialist transition from social democracy’s early days appear to have been refuted upon consideration of socialism’s long retreat from the late-twentieth century to the current day. However, certain tendencies identified by the radical social-democratic thinkers of interest remain pertinent today. These legacies are defensible precisely because they address perennial themes that are pertinent even today, and hence their examinations suggest signposts that need to be addressed by the modern Left, including recognition of the relative and non-absolute nature of today’s Third Ways in social democracy and, so, the possibility of an alternative that draws on a now-largely forgotten history of radical social democracy.

**Defining ‘Third Roads’ and ‘Third Ways’**

Throughout the history of progressive political movements, particular movements and tendencies, in this thesis will be called ‘Third Roads’ or ‘Third Ways’ have been recurring features. Such middle or ‘alternative’ ways have changed composition depending upon the relativities of the time. Often these movements and tendencies have played an important conciliating role, mediating between different impulses in social democracy and on the broader Left. Sometimes compromise positions have proved crucial for maintaining mass electoral appeal, and gradually shifting the relative centre – as opposed to some ‘frontal assault’. At other times, middle ways have provided a corrective to the most radical voluntarism in which even terroristic tactics have been seen as justified, as the ends justifying the means. Various Third Roads and Third Ways have also provided alternatives to and critiques of short-sighted and unprincipled opportunism – especially amongst right-revisionist social democracy. Others have been criticised as being opportunistic of themselves, for example, Lenin’s criticisms of Karl Kautsky.
Importantly, the terms ‘Third Road’ and ‘Third Way’ do not necessarily have the same meaning. A Third Road might be seen by its proponents as an alternative path to the same goal, as presented by a dominant revolutionary path: that is, a ‘Second Way’. The term ‘Third Road’, originating with Palmiro Togliatti in the Communist Party of Italy (Pierson, p 91), can be applied reasonably to the prior history as an distinct analytical category. A Third Way by comparison involves a fundamental compromise with regard to the goal itself. Here, the term ‘Third Way’ reflects the work of writers such as Anthony Giddens in the 1990s. However, it can also usefully be applied relatively, historically, and retrospectively as an analytical category, as I am doing here. This thesis will thus consider the ways in which currents in social democracy have filled either, or even both of these categories in different relative senses. More specifically, this thesis shall explore the questions of relative Third Roads and Third Ways, mainly in the European context, and spanning the period from 1848 to 1934, that is, from the origins of Marxism and Lassalleanism to the defeat of Austro-Marxism.

An examination of the Third Roads and Third Ways of this period is important today in that it provides a sense of, and adds to our understanding of the origins of social democracy, and of various perennial themes that remain relevant to political thinking. It is important also in that it demonstrates that the concepts of ‘Third Road’ and ‘Third Way’ are relative; and hence suggests how we should be open to alternatives to today’s prominent Third Ways. This addresses the practical problem of contemporary politics in which neo-liberalism comprises a closed system, and socialism is rejected out of hand through misconstruing its principles and history. In this context, the present study is also important because in the long run it is useful to retrieve perspectives that have been obscured and marginalised by dominant discourses with the passage of time. This is important as the perspectives in question hold insights that might be relevant for today and for our understanding of the past. It is especially important with regard to popular assumptions about socialism, and socialism’s historic legacy. These issues are not the subject of the present thesis or form part of its central argument. Nevertheless, they provide a sense of its motivating rationale.

This thesis contributes something new to the existing literature in that it provides a new perspective on Third Roads and Third Ways as relative concepts useful for describing political movements as far back as the nineteenth century. In this field, an examination of Lassalle and of the Austro-Marxists is especially rare. A consideration of Kautsky beyond his polemic with Lenin is also rare today. The thesis will provide both a historical backdrop as well as a history of ideas, with analysis of important primary texts in the relevant fields.

Apart from the rarity of enquiry into the works of the thinkers concerned, there are particular reasons for focussing on them. Lassalle is important for his specific role in the foundation of German social democracy. He is also interesting as a Third Way theorist during his period in that he poses a qualitative alternative to Marx on the
socialist Left. Anarchists such as Proudhon are also interesting, but being anarchists (as distinct from identifying as socialists) they are ruled out of the examination here.

The main focus of this thesis is upon the most important and most prominent theorists of the Second International – the umbrella group for radical social-democratic parties from 1889 to 1916. This includes from different perspectives – Kautsky (orthodoxy/centrism), Luxemburg (leftism), Bernstein (revisionism) and the Austro-Marxists (practical and theoretical innovation upon the base of Second International social-democratic politics). The Austro-Marxists are also considered. It is they who attempted to carry on radical social-democratic traditions after World War I with their efforts to reconcile communists and radical Social Democrats through the International Working Union of Socialist Parties (also known as the Two and a Half International). After that group’s dissolution, the theorists in question continued to adhere to the radical social-democratic perspective independently of the (communist) Third International via the Labour and Socialist International (LSI). One exception was Luxemburg who – as we will see – had attempted a clean break with pre-existing social democracy.

Apart from the limitations of space, analysis of Austro-Marxism was preferred over an analysis of Swedish social democracy because, from around the 1930s, Swedish social democracy develops its own traditions around corporatism and the welfare state, which were quite independent of the old Second International ways. How then are these intellectuals to be considered as Third Road and Third Way writers when most of these thinkers were part of the movement for social democracy as represented in the Second International? This I respond to as follows: if anything, it was the original insights of Marx himself and the orthodoxy developed and disseminated by Kautsky that could fairly be considered as the Second Way in the pre-1909 period. Even though Bernstein and Luxemburg contested the terrain of social democracy, they were relatively marginalised by the central position of the orthodoxy itself. In that sense, they could have been considered Third Roads or Third Ways.

From 1909 it is clear that Kautsky himself was being marginalised within German social democracy. The Praktiker (pragmatic) social-democratic leadership attempts to prevent, and refuses to endorse, his important work, The Road to Power because it was seen to be too radical, and with World War I, social democracy is torn asunder. Kautsky, Luxemburg and Bernstein all come to oppose the war and become central figures in the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) and the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD). As revolutions explode throughout Europe after years of misery of the World War, much of the Left looks to Bolshevism for inspiration. As Bolshevism became the Second Way, that is, the dominant socialist-left-revolutionary discourse, even Kautsky’s orthodoxy and centrism may be recast as a relative Third Road.
So, for the purposes of this thesis it is relevant to look back even before World War I for the origins of that centrisms and orthodoxy which retained a hold as a Third Road or Third Way amidst rising Bolshevism. Luxemburg’s libertarianism and anti-centralism marks her out, also, as a critic of emerging Bolshevik dominance. Hence, her theoretical insights and innovations may also be considered as the substance of a Third Road or Third Way – even though we are largely considering traditions that emerged initially in the context of the Second International (even Bolshevism itself).

In exploring and interrogating this terrain of Third Roads and Third Ways, this thesis takes up a series of specific research questions, which are elaborated below. These questions and the associated arguments follow in a logical analytical sequence, with the responses to succeeding questions building upon the research conducted into prior questions. However, the narrative of the thesis is organized chronologically. This means in practice that the questions and associated arguments of the thesis recur throughout various chapters.

**Basic Questions and Arguments**

**Question 1.** What approaches in the socialist movement from the 1848 to 1934 can be considered to have been Third Ways or Third Roads – and what specific contributions did these approaches make to the broader Left throughout this period?

The first general argument explored across the thesis will be that the defining approaches of Third Ways and Third Roads developed relative to consolidating and changing dominant (mainstream) First Ways and dominant alternative (revolutionary) Second Ways. For this to be more than a definitional claim, the thesis will trace the inter-relational development of Third Way and Third Road approaches. With regard to the second part of this question, suggestions about specific contributions will be made in the course of each chapter of the thesis.

**Question 2.** How did the Third Ways and Third Roads, in relation to First and Second Ways, develop across the period 1848 to 1934?

Having suggested that Third Ways and Third Roads are conciliating, mediating or rival approaches relative to unevenly consolidating mainstream (First Ways) and unevenly dominant alternative approaches (Second Ways), the thesis explores the shifting relativities that governed different Third Roads or Third Ways for any given period. The second generalizing argument will involve making a claim about the status of these relativities. To summarise the core argument here: Third Way theories, perspectives and traditions have always been relative; a contributing factor to their diverse nature and composition.
One way of pursuing this, and the way the thesis will adopt, is by examining different responses to contested ideological themes. This leads to the third basic question addressed by the thesis.

**Question 3. Which responses to different contested ideological themes provide a basis for arguing that Third Way and Third Road approaches have a defensible political-theoretical legacy?**

In this thesis, I provisionally chose the following basic tensions as the most important across the period 1848 to 1934:

- authoritarianism/freedom;
- inclusion/exclusion;
- voluntarism/determinism;
- principle/pragmatism;
- conflict/conciliation;
- nationalism/internationalism; and
- liberalism/socialism.

However, across the course of my research I found that other themes such as reform/revolution and orthodoxy/revisionism were relevant – with the orthodoxy/revisionism theme also incorporating a number of mediating sub-themes – for instance, ‘objectivism versus subjectivism’ in relation to debates about the labour theory of value.

The linking argument of the thesis is that over and above any specific contributions that Third Way and Third Road approaches might have made to specific debates during different historical periods, their defensible legacy rests in large part on their contribution to mediating or sometimes reconciling different contested ideological themes. In other words, Third Way approaches from the period continue to be important because they provide us with a way of exploring how to negotiate or reconcile fundamental political themes in tension.

Some Third Ways and Third Roads embody rather than necessarily reconcile one side or other of the contested themes we have considered. They can still be considered Third Ways or Third Roads in their pursuit of atypical ways of achieving socialism, or in so far as they present alternatives to the dominant First and Second Ways of the periods in question.

**Method and Analysis**

To maintain a simple and straightforward structure the study proceeds chronologically. Most chapters begin by providing a summary of their structure and
content. Thereafter, the historical context is provided for the period concerned, drawing upon historians such as Eric Hobsbawm, James Joll and George Eley. Following that, each chapter involves deep textual analysis of those canonical texts by the authors in question. Thus, for instance, my analysis of Rosa Luxemburg includes an analysis of *Reform or Revolution* and *The Mass Strike*. Each chapter also provides an analysis on contested themes and the consequent legacy arising from the texts in question. A summary of those contested themes and the legacy of the theorists in question is provided at the conclusion of each chapter. Finally, more-sweeping conclusions are provided in the final chapter, drawing upon the entire breadth of material covered.

The central argument of the thesis, that the defensible legacy of Third Way and Third Road approaches between 1848 and 1934 rests in large part on their contribution to mediating different contested ideologies – where ‘mediating’ here refers to bringing into negotiable relation – is developed on the basis of some methodological considerations and conceptual definitions.

1. The term ‘reconciling’ does not mean dissolving the differences between fundamental ideologies but rather allowing for dialogue that brings them into negotiable relation.

2. Here the concept of ‘ideologies’ does not necessarily mean distorted or manipulated ideas but rather patterned sets of normative ideas organized through relations of power. However, at times I will employ also the more specific classical Marxist meaning. Marx specifically refers in ‘Feuerbach: Opposition of Materialist and Idealist Outlooks’ to the ‘ruling ideas’, where ‘the ruling material force in society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force’ [and] … ‘the ideal expression of the dominant material relations’ (Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p 49, 1989). Hence, later Marxists have developed notions of Ideology (with a capital ‘I’) as that body of ideas used to rationalise capitalist social relations and naturalise bourgeois interests.

**Data Collection**

The research depends overwhelmingly on published material, that which may be called canonical theoretical texts by key theoretical figures in the history of radical social democracy. Language and geographical barriers would create difficulties with some information on the key thinkers and issues not being available, locally or in English, but most of the material has been translated into English and was accessed in the course of the research. There was no way of interpreting non-translated works – but because the most important (canonical) material has been translated, this was not too much of a problem. It is appropriate to focus on published material, including collections, because we are interested in public debates. The research therefore has
pursued the most widely employed references, both the ‘canonical’ and ‘iconic’ texts on each theme, but also some less familiar but nonetheless insightful texts.

Across the different historical periods, the analysis will centre on several Third Way or Third Road authors. They provide the primary sources in the field for analysing the nature of their approaches. This will include those of Lassalle, Kautsky, Bernstein, Luxemburg, Bauer, Renner, Max Adler and Rudolf Hilferding, which will be analysed in relation to the writings of figures such as Marx, Engels, Trotsky and Lenin. The thesis is part-history, part-interpretation, part-critique. At various points, it also draws from insightful histories in those fields by, for instance, Anson Rabinbach and Ilona Duczynska on Austro-Marxism. Through close engagement with those texts the aim is to provide an explanation of the ways in which those theorists’ work can now be considered relative Third Roads or Third Ways, and in that context, to provide insight into their legacies with regard to various important enduring, contested themes in political thought.

Further Literature Issues
There is no existing literature of which I am aware that takes the perspectives that I develop in the thesis. That is, I am not aware of anyone dealing with the specific theorists of interest as relative ‘Third Roads and Third Ways, either in relation to each other or in relation to the ‘Second Ways’ as I call them. Further, there are few works in the field that examine all these theorists and movements from the perspective of what I call radical social democracy.

A relatively small number of works look into Kautsky, Lassalle, and Austro-Marxism, etc. (e.g., Steenson, Beilharz, Footman, Bernstein, Gruber, Rabinbach and Ducynska). This I discovered in the course of my research. I referred to them as well as to the primary sources, the works of the various key theorists themselves. Peter Beilharz is a leading contemporary thinker who has also grappled with a socialist ‘history of ideas’ from a more decidedly Left vantage point, in particular with his Labour’s Utopias: Bolshevism, Fabianism and Social Democracy (1992). Beilharz observed that attempts to ‘reassess both Bernstein and Kautsky, to actually read their works, and to discover the nuances and insights contained in them’ were very rare (Beilharz, 1992, p 93).

Other works date from the 1970s, and some (e.g., Bernstein’s critique of Lassalle) are from the nineteenth century; Footman from 1947, when his work on Lassalle was first published. On the socialist Right Leszek Kolakowski’s Main Currents of Marxism was published in 1978. Main Currents of Marxism is an iconic history of Marxist ideas, even if from a critical and relatively conservative perspective. Thus, there have been a number of attempts at a socialist history of ideas over the decades but they are rare, indeed, in the post-Soviet context. The Socialist Left has still failed to recover even as triumphalist assumptions on the permanence, universality and supposedly
unchallenged status of liberal capitalism associated with the likes of Fukuyama are themselves widely seen as discredited (Harmon, C, p 258)

A reassessment of the ‘classical’ Marxist thinkers and their contemporaries, and based on close reading of their works, is overdue. This rich and historically important period of socialist thought remains relevant despite its neglect in contemporary scholarly thinking. Following Beilharz and Kolakowski, the time is right for a new history of socialist ideas, with special emphasis on radical social democracy. In part I seek to build on Beilharz’s work by exploring previously neglected material; considering Lassalle and Kautsky in greater depth, for instance, and also the Austro-Marxists. I also develop new perspectives on the relevance of post-Marxist insights for a close reading of radical social democracy and ‘classical’ Marxism’. In this process a close reading of the primary references from Marx, Engels, Lenin, Kautsky, Trotsky, Luxemburg, Lassalle and the Austro-Marxists is also crucial.

To summarise: the core purpose in this thesis is to engage with the primary texts produced by the theorists of radical social democracy, and intimately and in detail, but also to situate them historically, and also contextualise them along the lines of the contested themes I develop. The aim is one of creating new interpretations in a field that has been neglected historically by most within the Left. Though radically opposed to each other, Bolshevists and contemporary Third Way theorists both reject the radical social democrats, accusing them of being mere historic curiosities without modern day relevance or of having been apologists for war, or for surrendering in the face of counter-revolution and imperialism. Much is at stake. My aim is to demonstrate a historical legacy that remains valuable regardless of those who would relegate all the thinkers whom I explore ‘to the dustbin of history’. (Trotksy in Getzler, p 162)

Finally, from Stephen Bronner’s Socialism Unbound I derive several elements for my approach to elaborating the topic of socialist Third Roads and Third Ways from 1848 to 1934 and their legacies. Like Bronner, 1848 is my starting point, for practical and for symbolic reasons. This was the period of capitalism’s rise, a period of nationalist and liberal revolutions that seemed suggestive of the future. It was also the year that Marx wrote The Communist Manifesto, which would become one of the most influential and important political documents in modern history. Progressively thereafter, the mantle of the revolutionary social class was to be taken on by the rising proletariat (Bronner, 2011, pp 1-5). Like Bronner, I emphasize the liberation of ‘the ideology of socialism from its authoritarian and parochial shackles’ (Bronner, 2011, p xiv). This manifests in a more positive appraisal of theorists like Kautsky, Bernstein and Luxemburg who variously took relatively liberal or libertarian approaches, in contrast with Lenin and Trotsky.
Finally, following from Bronner, a motivating assumption behind this thesis is that reinterpretation for the future depends on a critical engagement with the past. The contested themes I consider in this thesis are often perennial. Even a century after Marx, themes such as liberalism and socialism, conflict and conciliation, and voluntarism and determinism are still pertinent to modern socialism.

Hence, drawing from Bronner:

Teleology is a thing of the past. Dialectics will not magically resolve contradictions between freedom and necessity, liberty and authority, individuality and solidarity. Judgement is always required, not only with respect to an action’s prospects for success, but also to its moral legitimacy. Freedom may ultimately rest on what Hegel and Marx would have termed the ‘insight into necessity’: Socialist theory today rests on the ability to create a plausible – not an absolute – connection between ends and means. Years of ideological neglect and intellectual ignorance have produced a lack of clarity about socialism that is so debilitating precisely because its reinterpretation for the future depends on a critical engagement with its past. (Bronner, 2011, p xviii)

Finally, my approach to interpretation is similar to that deployed by Stephen Bronner in *Socialism Unbound* in that:

1. I draw on key public texts from the period written by left thinkers and participants whose work was important to evoking debate in their time, and in some cases still evokes debate today;
2. I have closely read those texts in order to interpret them, and to draw useful lessons that are applicable to contemporary debate; and
3. I interrogate those texts in the context of responding to key analytical tensions.

*Interpretative Method*

The thesis will consider a variety of texts – including primary references and histories relevant to the field. These texts shall then be located in their broader political and cultural contexts. The interpretative method comes from theorists of what might be called ‘Third Way historical materialism’ and includes the following considerations:

- An acceptance of the tension between contingency/ choice and materialism/ structure/ determinism in the constitution of historical processes – that is, that people make their own history, but not under conditions of their own choosing;
- A rejection or fundamental modification of the base/structure framework;
- A rejection of hard structuralism; and
- An acceptance of the importance of textual production and contested ideas in the development of political practices.
Here I have drawn upon a number of assumptions present in Anthony Giddens’s theory of structuration and his critique of historical materialism. This is not to say I consistently apply the full range and framework of Giddens’s theory of structuration or agree with his overall standpoint. Rather, in light of Giddens’s status as a modern Third Way theorist, he provides an important symbolic as well as practical guide to method. At various times in the thesis this approach is complemented, qualified or tested in comparison with Hobsbawm’s relative orthodoxy and the post-Marxism of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau. These theorists all help provide perspectives from which to maintain a critical history of ideas. I draw from these theorists as required.

The following is a summary of those elements in Giddens’s theory that are useful for the thesis, but also highlights criticism where Giddens’s assumptions and my own are not entirely aligned. Giddens rejects the functionalist and evolutionary undertones that most definitely can be detected in Kautsky, and in other ways in Luxemburg (Giddens, 1981, p 14). Along with Giddens, through the course of this thesis I accept the complexity of history: Where the evolving means and mode of production, and also the class struggle, are important aspects. They are not the only important aspects, however. Hence, for Giddens there is no universal unfolding class-struggle dialectic, for instance, as suggested in Marx, that struggle emerges according to its own necessary and inescapable internal logic. Rather, historical development and change is held to be non-teleological and contingent (Giddens, 1981, pp 20-21).

Giddens develops a concept of ‘inter-societal systems’. By this he means that systems ‘interpenetrate and influence each other’ as against (Marxist and Hegelian) conceptions which regard society (or history) as an ‘isolated unit’, and as ‘containing within itself the mechanisms which necessarily bring about its transformation’ (Giddens, p 23). Yet, despite rejecting Marx’s dialectic, Giddens supposes the seeds of change are present in discourses and social structures through the interventions and mediations of knowledgeable and wilful social actors. Still, it should be noted that the Marxist approach is corrective in the sense of seeking to grasp underlying social conflicts beyond typical ideological narratives of national glory and great men, even including those considered in this thesis.

Significantly, Giddens explains his conception of contradiction as:

an opposition or disjunction between structural principles of a social system, such that the system operates in negation. That is to say, the operation of one structural principle presumes another which negates it’ (Giddens. P 29, 1981).

Giddens’s notion of contradiction is compatible with a Marxist analysis of class struggle. That is, the structural principle of exploitation in the context of giving rise to the proletariat as a conscious agent for change involves a potential for negation (Giddens, 1981, p 29). One difference, again, is that Giddens rejects a determinist
interpretation of class struggle and other loci of contradiction. Because of the element of choice, it is uncertain where contradictions will take us. I also accept such underlying assumptions in my criticisms of the theorists referred to in this thesis.

Also of use in Giddens is his supposition that power can take enabling and positive as well as exploitative and oppressive forms. To summarise: Giddens sees power as being present in all social interaction, and whether in an enabling form or otherwise in relations of domination, exploitation and, or oppression. This governs opportunities for social transformation. (Giddens, 1981, pp 28-29). Giddens also identifies diverse forms of oppression and exploitation, criticising Marx for an over-emphasis on class. This is especially relevant to a history of ideas, particularly when developed by intellectuals such as those discussed in this thesis who have an ambiguous relation to class (e.g., Lassalle’s rejection of the class-struggle schema accepted by many Marxists where in the necessary course of events liberal bourgeois revolution comes first) (Giddens, 1981, pp 28-29).

Perhaps most important for this thesis and its underlying theoretical assumptions is Giddens’s ‘duality of structure’. That is, his theorization that people as social actors are involved internally in the reproduction (and alteration) of social systems and social structures. For instance, there is the example of language. If Giddens’s presumptions are correct this provides an opening for change – a degree of contingency about future possibilities. Assuming free will the supposition is that similar scenarios may have radically different outcomes. That is, they are unpredictable. Hence, Giddens argues that,

an episodic transition that occurs in one historical conjuncture may have quite a different form, and quite different consequences, to an apparently similar episode in another conjuncture (Giddens, 1981, p 24).

A consequence of Giddens’s theory here is that evolutionary approaches to history – thought of in terms of necessary stages (again, take Kautsky, Martov and the notion of a progression from liberal bourgeois to socialist revolution) – is rejected (Giddens, 1981, p 23).

Giddens’s approach to the question of social change is similar to Mouffé and Laclau for whom social relations are not sutured or closed. Rather, social change is up for renegotiation through counter-hegemonic strategy and collective will formation. This thesis shares those assumptions. However, if anything, perhaps Giddens is too optimistic. Here, because social actors are constantly involved in the renegotiation of social discourses from within, Giddens contends:

The inherent relation between production and reproduction involved in the idea of the duality of structure carries with it the implication that the seeds of change
are present in every moment of the constitution of social systems across time and space (Giddens, 1981, pp 24-25).

Hence, Giddens’s approach is in some ways similar to my positioning, that structure and agency condition each other. Also, Giddens’s anti-functionalism leads him to reject any concept of system-needs, that is, needs are held by agents and not by systems. While we can agree that the capitalist system is not an agent and does not have needs in the same way as human beings, we can identify certain requirements necessary for capitalist systemic reproduction.

Functionalism can be interpreted conservatively as ruling out alternatives, but it can also be interpreted in the sense of systemic imperatives. Here, so long as there are openings to challenge such systems and their imperatives (especially capitalism), recognition of the function of the reserve army of labour under capitalism, for instance, ought not be seen as a problem for us (Giddens, 1981, p 17). Giddens tries to deny functionalism ‘without sacrificing an interest in long term, large-scale social processes’ (Giddens, 1981, p 19) Again, he attempts this through his notion of a ‘duality of structure’. To elaborate further, according to Giddens’s theory, active, knowing agents, including the writers discussed across this thesis, are complicit in producing and reproducing virtual structures (and hence discourses) of language, knowledge and so on.

Giddens thinks that regardless of Marx’s idea of praxis that Marx and Marxists have not sufficiently emphasized human beings as active, knowing beings (Giddens, 1981, p 22). This is relevant to the kind of history of ideas presented in this thesis. As Giddens explains, this means that ‘the structured properties of social systems are simultaneously the medium and outcome of social acts’ (Giddens, 1981, p 19). Furthermore, Giddens contends:

The most trivial exchange of words implicates the speakers in the long-term history of the language in which those words are formed, and at the same time in the continuing reproduction of that language. (Giddens, 1981, pp 19-20)

Giddens’s interpretation of social change is much more open-ended – involving contingency and choice – whereas orthodox Marxists had supposed a (dialectical) systemic unfolding with a pre-given logic and teleology, and with social change occurring after the fashion of iron-clad necessity. Here, again, the assumption of choice is taken as refuting the assumption of some necessary functionalism. However, again, a rejection of the conservative assumption of necessary function (even considered in the sense of Hegel’s ‘the real is the rational’) should not mean a denial of systemic imperatives under capitalism that can potentially be overcome through collective will formation and counter-hegemonic strategy that brings about some transition beyond capitalism, or at least, capitalism as we know it.
This enables the development of a history of ideas that recognises but does not depend upon the relationship between the structure of social relations during the time frames in question and the ideas of the writers concerned. Here the contextualisation of the various periods is deployed as a framing process. Importantly, global systemic imperatives and social, economic logic make the economic and social prison house of capitalism very hard to escape, even in the time of the writers in question. If anything, Giddens downplays this aspect. However, drawing upon Mouffe and Laclau, we can say that the suturing (of social relations and social struggles) is not absolute.

All such elements inform Giddens’s theory of structuration. Giddens appears to reject the most radical voluntarism but, again, also rejects determinism in favour of the competent, intending, knowing and reasoning agent. The agents that this thesis is trying to understand are left, political writers engaged in debate where they are intending and reasoning subjects – making history but not under conditions of their own choosing.

The Period in Question

The period covered by the thesis was one of tumultuous change. There was the industrial revolution and growth of the industrial proletariat across Europe, accompanied by the growth of the organised working class. The 1848 European revolutions had illustrated the continued resistance of liberalism in the face of absolutism, but the publishing of Marx’s *The Communist Manifesto* during this period prefigured the rise of a new working-class movement. Different factions vied for control of this movement. There was conflict in the First International between the anarchists and the Marxists; in Germany between the Lassalleans and the Marxists; between revisionism, the left social democracy of Luxemburg, and the orthodoxy of Karl Kautsky and August Bebel.

Socialism originally rose to prominence in Germany, as a consequence of cooperation on the part of Marxists and Lassalleans. A Marxist position would hold that the real precondition of socialism was the growth of the industrial proletariat and, indeed, the proletariat grew substantially in much of Europe throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.

Before these events, the major socialist influence in Europe had been that of the utopians (Fourier, Owen, Saint-Simon) who like Proudhon preferred a range of methods including small-scale communes and mutual aid. The Social Democratic Party’s (SPD) Gotha Programme (1875) was central to early German socialism, which was a negotiated compromise between Marxists and Lassalleans. Marx’s response to it helped mobilise support behind the explicitly Marxist Erfurt Programme in 1892. This marked a period of orthodox Marxist ascendance in Germany.
Then there was the period of the anti-socialist laws of the Bismarck rule in Germany (1878-1888). These laws helped provide the rationale for the pragmatism and social-democratic embrace of nationalism and even imperialism that followed. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the relativities of German social democracy shifted with rising German nationalism and an arms race, especially with Britain. This helped set the scene for the rise of the so-called Praktiker faction, which drew upon Bernstein’s revisionism to complement aggressive nationalism and ultimately supported German involvement in the Great War (much to Bernstein’s horror). Even for Kautsky there was a determination not to provoke the bourgeoisie, but to wait until the time was ripe. Also of note was the 1871 Paris Commune, the example of which – in addition to that of the Jacobins in the French Revolution – Kautsky was later to regard as central for his critique of Bolshevism. All this was crucial - because the demographic expansion of the working class made the question of its leadership ever-more important.

If anything, the early to mid-twentieth century was to comprise an even more tumultuous era. There was war, a depression and the growth of an organised capitalism, which the Austro-Marxists thought would add to capitalism’s longevity but also perhaps lay the foundations for socialism. The 1905 Russian Revolution inspired Rosa Luxemburg’s enthusiasm for spontaneity. Crucially there was the 1917 Russian Revolution with the split in the social democratic movement, which set the scene for divisions that were to dominate left politics for most of the remainder of the century. The Bolshevik tendency, which became hegemonic in the world communist movement, rested on concepts such as the vanguard party, democratic centralism, openness to insurgency as a means of seizing power, and an interpretation of Marx’s dictatorship of the proletariat as the revolutionary dictatorship of communist parties, being the representatives of the working class. The Bolshevik tendency also exhorted the example of workers’ councils or Soviets, as opposed to liberal and democratic pluralism and conventional representative democracy.

Hence, for much of the twentieth century, social-democratic Third Roads and Third Ways were largely conceived as middle ways between mainstream social democracy and Bolshevism. Mainstream social democracy, on the other hand, became increasingly focused on parliaments as the primary arena for contesting power. It embraced a reform agenda that promoted policies of amelioration rather than fundamental changes in the structures of political and economic power. It is in this context that the contributions of the Austro-Marxists and their attempts to heal the socialist movement were so important.

**Exploring the Basic Questions in Context**
**Question 1 in Context**

**Question 1.** What approaches in the socialist movement from the 1848 to 1934 can be considered to have been Third Ways or Third Roads – and what specific contributions did these approaches make to the broader Left throughout this period?

This question relates to a structure alluded to earlier. The main authors and activists under consideration as relative Third Roads or relative Third Ways include Ferdinand Lassalle, Eduard Bernstein, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Kautsky and various Austro-Marxists. The chapters will consider in depth the complex contributions of each of these. Each has left us a significant practical and theoretical legacy.

**Question 2 in Context**

**How did the relativities of Third Ways and Third Roads in relation to First and Second Ways, develop across the period of 1848-1934?**

In relation to this second question, the thesis explores the shifting relativities that governed that which could be considered a Third Way or Third Road for any given period. That is, across the broad expanse of history certain tendencies could be considered Third Roads to socialism or Third Ways depending how we treat them in relation to other dominant tendencies. Nevertheless, for analytical purposes, our conception of the First Way is largely consistent throughout the period of study – comprising the various forms of mainstream ideology in the context of capitalism with bourgeois ascendance. This includes those social-democratic Praktiker who effectively made their peace with nationalism, capitalism (and ultimately militarism); as well as the fascism arising in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. The Second Way, defined as the dominant revolutionary discourse of a time and place, shifts throughout our chosen period in Europe. Hence, Marxism is clearly elucidated in 1848 with *The Communist Manifesto* but as late as 1875 has to compromise in several critical areas with Lassalleanism. This is relevant for the period 1848 to 1880. The hold of Lassalleanism on German social democracy is not decisively loosened until the Erfurt Conference in 1891. In hindsight, Marxism is the *most significant revolutionary discourse of the period*. In this context Lassalleanism is defined as a Third Way for the period.

For our second period, 1880-1905, things become more complex. Marxism as the emerging dominant revolutionary discourse crystallises around an orthodox centre, especially the figure of Karl Kautsky in Marxist theory. Hence, it comprises the dominant Second Way, though later on, from 1917, as discussed in Chapter Seven, this orthodoxy was itself to become a relative Third Road to socialism, and because Bolshevism emerges as the dominant socialist-revolutionary discourse. So, later in the thesis, we will return to this period to establish the historic roots of the orthodox Marxist challenge to Bolshevism.
Notably, for the period 1880-1905 a number of tendencies are notable as Third Roads and Third Ways. To the left of the orthodox Centre there arose the Left epitomised by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht; to its right arose the revisionism of Bernstein. The consequent debate has been referred to as the Revisionist Controversy and is an important focus for study in Chapter 2. The Erfurt Programme adopted in 1891 was also crucial in that it comprised a decisive break of German social democracy from Lassalleanism. Here, it is also necessary to look back, in a sense, as Marx’s ‘Critique of the Gotha Programme’ was an essential document with regards to that process. It may have been written in 1875 but was not published until 1890-1891.

For our third period, 1905-1914 (spanning three chapters), some things remain the same, but new currents also arise. The Bolsheviks are at the fringes of the world socialist movement during this period compared with German social democracy. The orthodox Centre remains the dominant revolutionary socialist discourse (and hence the Second Way), although it is increasingly displaced by rising social-democratic pragmatism. Kautsky’s *The Road to Power* received a hostile reception from mainstream pragmatic German social democracy. It is during this period that the school known as Austro-Marxism begins to develop. This development is of special interest as its leaders and chief theorists were to be at the forefront of attempts to reconcile communist and social-democratic currents, as they came to be understood, after the organisational and theoretical split which developed as a consequence of World War I (1914) and the Russian Revolutions of 1917. Austro-Marxism is also important; even during this early period its protagonists developed original and path-breaking insights independently of the orthodox Marxist centre as epitomised by Karl Kautsky.

During the fourth period, 1914-1924, everything changes. Social democracy splits with the onset of World War I. For the purposes of this thesis, it thus becomes important to follow this change to test the general applicability of the argument about relative relations. By 1917, triumphant Bolshevism arises as the new dominant revolutionary socialist discourse – the new Second Way. The subsidiary argument here is that exponents of the old Marxist orthodoxy retreat to comprise a relative Third Road, and a relative Third Way. At this point, therefore, it is important to revisit the old Marxist centre orthodoxy to establish its origins and foundations. The Lenin-Kautsky debate is crucial. The year 1924 is an appropriate point to end for this chapter as it is the year of Lenin’s death. The Austro-Marxists very notably attempt to reconcile the self-avowed communist and social-democratic movements.

The fifth period of our analysis spans 1924 to 1934. The First Way changes during this period with the capitalist world split along liberal, authoritarian and fascist lines. Meanwhile, the Second Way, the dominant socialist-revolutionary discourse, metamorphoses into Stalinism. As far as Third Roads and Third Ways go, Austro-Marxism continues its attempts to reconcile communism and social democracy, and its theorists develop powerful critiques of fascism and of left sectarianism. Karl
Kautsky pens his final critique of Bolshevism, which itself is mutating at this point into fully-fledged Stalinism, with permanent institutional terror and the cult of personality.

**Question 3 in Context**

*What responses to different contested ideological themes provide a basis for arguing that Third Way and Third Road approaches have a defensible political-theoretical legacy?*

This question is important in establishing the specific debates, thematic conflicts and mediations of interest. It asks for a discussion of the substance of the defensible legacies of the Third Road and Third Way theorists considered in the thesis.

The following themes are unevenly and differentially negotiated by the various writers across the different periods. It is important to note that this list of contested themes is not exhaustive of the material we deal with in this thesis.

**Orthodoxy versus Revisionism and Leftism**

These themes, contested through conflict and mediation, involve many aspects and sub-themes with aspects emerging through the theoretical standpoints of the various theorists that I explore. Most notably, these themes arose in the context of the revisionist controversy involving the orthodoxy of Kautsky versus the leftism of Luxemburg and the revisionism of Bernstein. These were important theoretical struggles for the heart and soul of social democracy, and the insights so arising arguably remain a valuable legacy. Kautsky held to a strategically conservative but nonetheless revolutionary perspective on the disciplined class struggle. Bernstein rejected central Marxist tenets, adopting an evolutionary and gradualist position, while nonetheless retaining much from Marx. Luxemburg adopted a more strategically and tactically aggressive posture, promoting the mass strike and a perspective which later became known as ‘spontaneism’ (Geras, pp 111-112) Arising from this discourse and sometimes arising in other contexts such as the writings of Lassalle are sub-themes such as idealism and utopianism versus scientific socialism as well as philosophical and historical materialism. Also there are the sub-themes such as sceptical empiricism and eclectic theorization versus comprehension of totality through the dialectical method. This also involved the conflicting theme of assumed historical contingency as distinct from assumed fixed and progressive teleology. Crucial to the revisionist controversy there also arose such contested themes as capitalist adaptation versus capitalist collapse, and the associated middle-class resilience versus class bifurcation.

**Reform versus Revolution**

The reform versus revolution theme is also crucial in the history of Third Roads and Third Ways and the other discourses to which they relate, such as Leninism. It is central to the revisionist controversy but important enough to treat separately. Further,
it is a theme that can be interpreted in more than one manner: Either as qualitative versus merely quantitative change, or as the imposition of a new constitution as opposed to legislated reform within the existing framework. For others it is a matter of swift and violent change through insurrection – again as opposed to gradual reform within the existing constitutional framework. This multitude of interpretations can also give rise to syntheses such as the Austro-Marxist notion of slow revolution or ideas of revolutionary reforms. Also arising from such mediations are notions of sustained dual power, which was essentially the means employed by the Austro-Marxists to defend the democratic path to socialism. For Kautsky there were two possible revolutionary paths: Of attrition and of annihilation, perhaps linkable to Gramscian notions of war of position and war of movement.

**Voluntarism versus Determinism**

The theme of voluntarism versus determinism is also important in the context of Marxist orthodoxy versus Bolshevism, that is, in the materialist, determinist and economist premises of the orthodoxy versus the attempts of the Bolsheviks to pursue a revolution regardless of the working class being in a minority. Other relevant issues include Bernstein’s position and that of the Austro-Marxists. Also important was the Eugen Dühring of *Anti-Dühring* fame. (Eugen Duhring being a well-known Kantian socialist scholar who was the subject of Engels’ critique) The Kantian socialist critique of materialism is also interesting for its insistence on free will and, hence, some kind of transcendentalism or Cartesian dualism. Other issues that will arise in my treatment of Lassalle include, for instance, the determinist implications of Hegelianism, but also Lassalle’s personal influence on the development of labour and socialism, especially in Germany. The voluntarism versus determinism opposition can also be negotiated in the form of necessity versus choice, with that also being grounded on assumptions of philosophical materialism versus philosophical anti-materialism, for example, in the form of Cartesian dualism.

**Authority and Authoritarianism versus Freedom**

The theme of authority versus freedom is important in the instances of socialism from below as compared with the centralism and discipline demanded by both Lassalle, the Bolsheviks, and finally by the Stalinists. For the Bolsheviks, revolution in its actual practice meant ‘the highest possible intensification of the principle of the state’ (Trotsky, pp 157-159) whereas for Kautsky and Luxemburg this broke the nexus between revolution, socialism, liberty and democracy. These themes are also relevant in relation to the authoritarian and nationalist currents that developed, most notably in Germany. Luxemburg and Kautsky defend even the freedoms of the bourgeoisie, with the defence of liberal rights as part of a broader democratic schema. This is also connected to notions of the state as potentially enabling, versus the notion that state power is inherently repressive for the purposes of one class repressing another. Lassalle is the dissenting voice here, viewing the state as an enabling and benign force. Finally, are liberal arguments accusing socialism generally of being authoritarian, on the basis of the interests of a laissez-faire ruling ideology.
**Inclusion versus Exclusion**
The theme of inclusion versus exclusion is relevant to the whole theme of Third Roads and Third Ways in that these are relative to and excluded by the dominant First and Second ways. Here the content is entirely different from today where the relative Third Way ideology of Giddens has become hegemonic in Western social democracy.

**Conflict versus Conciliation**
The theme of conflict versus conciliation is elaborated most by the Austro-Marxists who sought to reunite and mediate between that which became known as the communist and social-democratic currents on the left after 1914-1917. It is also relevant for those who could be considered liberal socialists in their attempts to reconcile ideologies that were widely presumed to be conflicting. Some social-democratic currents also came to renounce class struggle in favour of conciliation based upon social welfare. The orthodox Marxists are notable for their insistence on class struggle, with a liberal bourgeois revolution to be followed by socialist revolution. Again, the Bolshevist variant presumed the possibility of skipping over the bourgeois revolution. Lassalle is notable for his hostility towards the liberal bourgeoisie and for his attempts to force a tactical alliance with Prussian absolutism in pursuit of social welfare and equal universal suffrage. Also relevant to the conflict versus conciliation theme are various interpretations of the nature of state power. Some liberals suppose the possibility of a neutral and, or liberal state but this is rejected by most Marxists. This is also relevant for the other theme, of reform versus revolution.

**Nationalism versus Internationalism**
From the beginning Marx professed a commitment to internationalism, that ‘the working people have no country’ (Marx and Engels, 1989, p 129) In this he was to stand in stark contrast to Lassalle’s proclaimed nationalism. Notably, though, Lassalle also had an interest in progressive struggles in other countries, for example, Garibaldi’s struggle in Italy. Marxist internationalism also stood in stark contrast to the self-proclaimed ethno-nationalists on the right of German social democracy, specifically within the so-called Praktiker faction. (ie: the practical or pragmatic faction) (Steger, 1997, pp 73-74) The nationalist/internationalist divide is also interesting with regard the Austro-Marxists’ attempts to support national self-determination in the context of a broader internationalism, including their critique of pre-World War I Austro-Hungary. This was done effectively in defence of a kind of early multiculturism. Finally, the Soviet commitment to internationalism declined under Stalin, with the pursuit of socialism in one country, while the Second International, including the social-democratic countries, became weaker and weaker, with Social Democrats increasingly operating in the national, not international, context. The result was a weakened international social democracy incapable of responding to the threats of capital flight and capital strike or effective solidarity in the face of the threat posed by fascism.
Liberalism versus Socialism
Finally, there is the theme of liberalism versus socialism arising with the self-proclaimed liberal revisionism of Bernstein. It is seen, perhaps, in relation to the analysis of authority/freedom, including Luxemburg’s position. Although Bernstein’s position is crucial in that he sees socialism as liberalism’s spiritual successor, that is, that they complement rather than contradict each other.

To conclude this summary of themes: The above list is not exhaustive of the scope of this thesis and other opposing and mediating themes will be discussed from chapter to chapter and in the Conclusion.

Structure and Chapter Outlines

Chapters 1 and 2
Chapter One will begin by setting the historical context for the period 1848 to 1875. Thereafter there will be a brief consideration of the origins of socialism, and the utopian socialists that preceded Marx. From here the first chapter will span from 1848, the year of European revolutions and of Marx’s The Communist Manifesto, to 1880, the year in which Engels’s Socialism: Utopian and Scientific was published. The year 1880 is an important date to include in the period covered by Chapter One given that Engels’s work was a seminal piece in establishing the content of the scientific socialism which was to become hegemonic on much of the left, especially in Germany. It is crucial to establish the meaning and content of this scientific socialism as it became the main Second Way of this period with which the First and Third Ways and Roads in this study are compared. Here the First Way refers to those various forms in which the bourgeois and capitalist order were defended; in other words, the hegemonic mainstream ideological discourse. The Second Way refers to the hegemonic revolutionary socialist discourse, changing in relative terms as history progresses as already explained. We will examine Lassalleanism as the main socialist challenger to Marxist hegemony on the Left during this period.

Chapters Three and Four will take up the period that Hobsbawm calls the ‘Age of Empire’. These chapters will range from 1880 to 1914. This time-frame is chosen so as to encompass the revisionist controversy in social democracy, especially the exchanges between Karl Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg and Eduard Bernstein. These chapters together will also encompass the pre-World War I period, including important Austro-Marxist perspectives on the nationalities question that are relevant for the pre-war context. This period also includes an important work by Karl Kautsky, The Road to Power, which is relevant to Kautsky’s later exchanges with Lenin as well as his differences with the German social-democratic right pragmatists. (though we will not deal with this part of Kautsky’s work at length until Chapter Five)
These chapters suggest that both the revisionist (Bernsteinian) and left-Marxist (Luxemburgian) currents had certain strengths which are worthy of recognition, and remain potential sources of inspiration. Both currents could be considered Third Ways in the sense of standing as an alternative to the current that was to become the dominant Stalinist current in Marxism. I draw this conclusion as the notion that Stalin was pursuing the same communist end goal as Marx is untenable in the light of the practice of terror and the cult of personality. However, compared with the prior orthodoxy, Bernstein may appear to herald a Third Way because he renounces the final goal. Luxemburg’s position can be called a Third Road because she maintains the same end goal as the orthodoxy proponents and centrists. They also stood as alternatives to the opportunist currents in social democracy, which we identify as part of the First Way of various base capitalist ideologies. Though, as we will see all this is debatable, and can be considered in differing relative senses. That these perspectives may have comprised Third Ways in some interpretations helps us relativise the concept of the Third Way both historically, and in its modern application.

On the Left, again influenced by the Marxist mainstream, Bernstein has often been dismissed as the arch revisionist and, hence, rejected out of hand. However, I will contend that Bernstein’s eclecticism involved many insights. Especially important were his attempts to wed socialism and liberalism, and thus his fruitless striving for a liberal-socialist alliance in Germany. Bernstein’s evolutionary socialism denied a violent, revolutionary rupture. And his impression became a one that the future was not closed off by metaphysical historic forces (although Bernstein did seem to entertain a notion of a march forward for social democracy that was accumulative and which did not involve dead ends and defeats). Despite this, the German liberal movement, such that it was, was co-opted by nationalist and governmental forces. And Bernstein’s ideas were taken up, in part, by opportunists (Praktiker) seeking to use it as a cloak of legitimacy behind which to advance a nationalist and class-collaborationist agenda.

Chapter Four, however, will mainly concern Rosa Luxemburg’s response to the revisionist controversy; as well as her theorization: Of the mass strike as a revolutionary strategy; on the notion of socialist revolution as a necessity; and of the meaning of ‘spontaneism’ as it relates to class struggle and revolution.

Chapters Five to Eight will explore the first part of the period that Hobsbawm calls the ‘Age of Extremes’. Chapter Five will range from 1907 to 1915, with its development of Kautsky’s centrist Marxism, and Chapter Six will consider pre-World War I Austro-Marxism. Chapter Seven takes in the landmarks of World War I, the Russian Revolution (1917) and Lenin’s death (1924). Chapter Eight will range from 1925 to 1934 and will be mainly concerned with the rise and fall of Austro-Marxism in practice.
Kautsky’s contribution to the Erfurt Programme is very important here, epitomising the orthodox or Marxist centre position of the period. Kautsky’s (earlier) position is notable for its rejection of class alliance between socialists and middle-class liberals, but also his preference for peaceful methods of class struggle. Here he was in agreement with Bernstein in his wariness of insurrection as a strategy, and yet, he nonetheless departed from Bernstein in his insistence on a clear rupture: A political revolution in Germany. This was to become even more apparent in The Road to Power (written 1909). In terms of this argument, the orthodox Marxist centrist position held by Kautsky, and as perhaps epitomised later in the position of Julius Martov in Russia, only emerged later as a Third Way as this position was itself displaced by Bolshevism (then Stalinism) as the Second Way on the Left.

I intend to show via engagement and analysis of both The Erfurt Programme (Otherwise published as ‘The Class Struggle’; and listed as such in our Bibliography) and The Road to Power that Kautsky demonstrated a keen strategic sense whereby one organisational stronghold after the other would be consolidated by the working class. Accordingly, the influence and preponderance of the working class could not but grow as a result of irresistible historical forces. Yet I also intend to show how this vision, informed by a teleological (practical as well as philosophical) historical materialism, ultimately failed. The forces of nationalism usurped the forces of internationalism, and the craving of some for order and authority eclipsed the impulses towards freedom. The theme of principle versus pragmatism will also be considered in this and other chapters, and especially how they played out in the context of German social democracy and in relation to issues of nationalism, authority and order.

Chapter Six will range from 1905 to 1914, that is, to the end of the period of Hobsbawm’s ‘Age of Empire’. I will consider Austro-Marxist analyses of the national question that were especially important in light of the impending world war. The works of Karl Renner and Otto Bauer are especially relevant here. Renner, in particular, imagined the transformation of Austria-Hungary into a democratic and federal state of nationalities, Nationalitatenstaat, in which nationalities could find self-expression but at the same time be reconciled (Bottomore pp 31-32).

Chapter Seven will focus on war and revolution in the period spanning 1914 to 1924, from the First World War to the death of Lenin and the end of the Russian Civil War. The chapter will consider Austro-Marxist analyses of the war economy and of the ideology underscoring it. The debate between Kautsky and Lenin is important here. The Austro-Marxists also attempted to take the lead in forming a new International during this period. This is also especially worthy of consideration in the context of Third Ways and Third Roads.

In the context of a successful Russian Revolution, Bolshevism became the hegemonic current on the Marxist left and orthodox positions held by Martov and Kautsky were
cast as Third Ways in a new relative sense. Here the perspective of Rosa Luxemburg also comprised a relative Third Way or Third Road of sorts: A libertarian socialist critique of Bolshevik authoritarianism and centralism that later could be applied without equivocation to the regime of Stalin.

Chapter Eight focuses on Austro-Marxism. In the wake of the Bolshevist and social-democratic split, the Austro-Marxists attempted to reconcile the competing currents on the Marxist Left. During the post-war period in question, the Bolsheviks were cast effectively in the tradition of the Jacobins who preceded them, and, as with the Jacobins, terror was seen as a legitimate instrument in the face of counter-revolution. During this period, Austro-Marxist analyses of fascism and changes in the composition and outlook of the working class were insightful. Austro-Marxist calls for left unity were suggestive of their conciliatory stance. As a practical expression of this, there was also an attempt to unite the various Marxist currents under the auspices of an International called the International Revolutionary Marxist Centre, or otherwise, the London Bureau. However, the Austro-Marxists are most well known for their positions on slow revolution, growth from within (counter-culture), progressive provisions of social infrastructure and services, and a lasting strategy of dual power as a last resort to defend the democratic path.

The thesis will conclude with a summary of the ways in which the many and varied Third Ways and Third Roads have defensible left legacies. This will be approached from a number of directions. I will make conclusions as to the ways in which various Third Roads and Third Ways sought to reconcile or otherwise simply navigate competing or contradictory trends/themes ranging from authority/freedom, to nationalism/internationalism. Where conciliation did not occur I will summarise the legacy of the various currents in the context of unresolved conflict. This, I argue, is the lasting legacy of the Third Way and Third Road writers – that they attempted to negotiate the political discursive and practical tensions of their time.
Chapter One: Establishing the ‘First Way’ and ‘Second Way’

Chapter One concerns the establishing of the First and Second Ways. That is, it concerns the proponents of hegemonic capitalism and the emerging Second Way of Marxist scientific socialism, which itself became hegemonic on the revolutionary Left. The chapter begins with a historical introduction that examines the emerging social forces from the period covered by both Chapters One and Two from 1848 to 1880. This includes an appreciation of emerging capitalism. Then, the origins of Marxism are traced with consideration given to a variety of thinkers who came to be known as ‘the utopian socialists’, and to Marx’s early works, including *The Communist Manifesto*.

The origins of what Marx and Engels called “scientific socialism” are considered at length, especially through analysis of Engels’s *Anti-Dühring*, as well as of the Young Hegelians and Greek philosophy. Despite publication immediately before the time-frame of the thesis, early intimations of Marx’s scientific socialism are also considered, and in the context of works such as the ‘Theses on Feuerbach’ (1845) and *The German Ideology* (1846). Marxist scientific socialism emerges as the most influential socialist discourse compared to other movements that might be considered Third Ways or Third Roads. Here the very idea of a Third Way must, in and of itself, always be considered relative. *The Communist Manifesto* marked the starting point for the rise to ascendancy of Marx’s developing theoretical framework and, for a time, hegemony on the Left.

This chapter is structured as follows. The period to be considered is circa 1848 to 1880, with occasional reference to the pre-1848 period. It is important to establish the roots of much of Marx’s thought, which go back to the time of the Young Hegelians. The first task will be to establish the broad historical context, and here I draw on the histories of Eric Hobsbawm: *The Age of Capital, 1848-1875*, and *How to Change the World*. I also draw from Geoff Eley’s *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000*. The industrial revolution, the revolutions of 1848, the formation of the German Social Democratic Party, the Paris Commune of 1871, the rise and fall of the First International were each important events of this period and form
background to the work of Marx and Engels and their contemporaries. At this stage, I will also locate the important Marxist texts of interest in their specific historical contexts.

Thereafter, the chapter presents an analysis of the crucial texts and controversies of the period. Marx and Engel’s own theory during the period in question is considered, beginning by establishing the bedrock of Marx’s theory and the intellectual debts he owes to the so-called utopian socialists. This entails an examination of the sources and development of Marx’s historical materialism, which he and Engels were to refer to as ‘scientific socialism’. Alienation, class struggle, the division of labour, philosophical materialism, dialectics were also crucial to Marx and Engels and, so, will be treated in detail.

The chapter will also consider Marx’s critique of the utopian socialists in The Communist Manifesto and in Engels’s own deep treatment of their contribution in Socialism: Utopian and Scientific (Marx and Engels, 1977, pp 102-143; Vol II, pp 95-151). Other sources will be drawn from intermittently, but there is not the scope here for an exhaustive study of Marx. Rather, the intention is to establish a reference point for the analysis of Third Roads and Third Ways relative to Marxism.

**Introducing the Historical Context**

The 1840s to the 1880s was a period of unprecedented technological and economic advancement. As Eric Hobsbawn explains, there was a massive expansion in the production of iron and the first mass production of steel, and there was the spread of rail infrastructure and the laying of submarine cables across the Atlantic. The telegraph enabled almost instantaneous communication across great oceans, and so revolutionised the media of the day (Hobsbawm, 1996, pp 4, 40-41, 58-60). Emergent capitalism involved great human suffering and waste, but also spurred world-changing innovations. There was the displacement of the peasants, and of the petty bourgeoisie by capitalism and the emerging capitalist class – and there were the brutal work conditions of industrial labour. Free labour became integral in playing one worker off against another at the time of the rise of an industrial reserve army. Capitalism was ultimately to prepare the way for relative abundance, but not before a terrible human cost had been paid.

This fundamental change was accompanied by a legitimising ideology of meritocracy. Nonetheless, most bourgeois ideologues ignored the reality of unequal opportunity, and the fact that capitalism was based on the systemic extraction of surplus value. Furthermore, self-proclaimed liberals often were quite comfortable with a class/property-weighted franchise, which marginalised the working class. In this context the very idea of a scientific socialism resonated with the spirit of the age. For the liberal bourgeoisie, at least, there was a seemingly boundless faith in ‘reason,
science, progress and liberalism’ (Hobsbawm, 1996, p 3; Ely pp 30-31). For the revolutionary Left it was much the same, save for faith in bourgeois liberalism.

The benefits of massively increased productivity flowed mainly to the bourgeoisie and the middle classes, with workers realising little of the fruits of their labours. This imbalance was to fuel the supposition of absolute emiseration upon which Marxist theory then rested (Hobsbawm, 1996, pp 34-35). For instance, in the absence of an aged pension, survival to old age “was a catastrophe to be stoically expected” (Hobsbawm, 1996, pp 221). It was a world where, as Hobsbawm explains, workers were ‘pushed into a common consciousness not only by … social polarisation but, in the cities at least, by a common style of life – in which the tavern (“the workman’s church” as a bourgeois liberal called it) played a central role – and by a common style of thought’ (Hobsbawm, 1996, p 223). This was Marx’s famous “class consciousness”. In consequence, and along with the escalation of the urbanisation process, was a shift in “the balance of power between classes”, most markedly in the years 1870-1914. This gave rise to demands for universal suffrage and representative government (Joll, p 26).

The trade cycle remained a feature of emerging capitalism. Although a great boom began in 1850 (p 30), by the 1870s Europe entered a great depression – not as severe as that which was to follow in the 1930s – but such as to fuel the radical critique of capitalism (Hobsbawm, 1996, pp 30, 45-46). The exponential expansion of trade increasingly meant, as Marx anticipated in his Manifesto, the creation of a world culture and a world market—so downturns and crises thus could not be quarantined. Increasingly global capitalism gave rise to a global movement for socialism.

In addition to emerging class consciousness the fires of nationalism also kept burning – Slavic nationalism, Italian nationalism and elsewhere, Arab nationalism. These were further complicated by religious tensions and feelings of religious solidarity consequent to Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic faiths. Italian nationalism was to result in a series of wars in pursuit of independence and expansion/national consolidation, though no single political change in the nineteenth century compares to occurrences to follow in the twentieth century. The varied nationalist tensions and ambitions were to erupt over 60 years later as part of the pretext for world war in 1914, and, indeed, the Austro-Marxists were to devote significant attention to the national question in the years preceding that catastrophe (Hobsbawm, 1996, pp 91-95).

As Hobsbawm explains, when faced with the prospect of real revolution, conservatives and the supposedly liberal bourgeoisie tended to draw together. In Germany especially much of these strata ended up embracing an ethno-nationalist ideology, such that there is reason to believe critics such as Kautsky were right to fear being compromised through any dealings with them. Hobsbawm concludes that the bourgeoisie widely abandoned its own politically liberal programme and effectively
“ceased to be a revolutionary force” (Hobsbawm, 1996, p 20). Although in an economic sense the bourgeoisie continued to develop the means of production, and in so doing, displaced old economic relations and redrew class lines to make way for its own rising influence. For instance, bourgeois economic interests for this period became dominant even in the absence of political liberalism (Hobsbawm, 1996, pp 104-105).

For Marx’s own part, he lost confidence in the immediate prospects for radical change after the “capitalist crisis of 1857” failed to lead to revolution. Engels was to outlive Marx, living to witness the rise of mass European socialist parties. As a consequence, according to Hobsbawm, German Social Democrat leader, August Bebel might have convinced Engels of the possibility of “direct transition”. Yet he also argues that until the end Engels did not have “legalistic and electoralistic illusions” (Hobsbawm, 2011, pp 65-67).

However, the socialist movement did grow and mature, as did organised labour more broadly, arising irresistibly as a consequence of the human conditions of industrialisation and capitalist exploitation and crisis. Amidst this drama there arose trade unions, socialist parties with mass memberships, thriving journals and socialist newspapers, and all amidst a struggle to establish the hegemonic revolutionary left ideology of the age.

Left historian Geoff Eley suggests that in addition to underlying economic causes political sources contributed to the growth of socialist movements and parties. For Eley, the 1860s were a turning point, with the spread of liberal constitutionalism across much of Europe. This included limited extension of the franchise, limited civil rights and limited legalisation of trade unions. A notable exception to this tendency was Bismarck’s anti-socialist laws. Specifically Eley observes that repression in Germany during the years of the anti-socialist law actually “encouraged German militants into socialism, while in Britain union toleration and parliamentary reform sealed ties with Liberalism.” Through strategic concessions, Eley argues, these constitutional settlements enjoyed remarkable resilience (Eley, pp 5-6, 33-34, 74). The fight that followed for “bourgeois democracy” was [increasingly] “conducted under working-class leadership, [and] won rights which enormously facilitated the mobilisation and organisation of mass working-class parties” (Hobsbawm, 2011, p 72).

Constitutional conditions in combination with breakneck industrialisation had the effect of enabling the rapid growth of social-democratic parties during the 1870s and 1880s. These parties were typified by centralized organisation, alliance with national-independent trade unions, and an electoral/parliamentary footing, and they were the main proponents of democracy in Europe. As Eley notes, by 1914 in the north-Central European ‘core’ countries social-democratic parties enjoyed between 25 and 40 per cent support in their national electorates. Before World War I, many Social
Democrats believed the extension of the suffrage, combined with a working-class electoral majority in favour of social-democratic parties, would make socialist transition inevitable and irresistible. These constitutional conditions were only to be radically advanced after the revolutions of 1917-1919.

It is worth noting, too, that after Marx’s death, the revisionist controversy and the later world war saw social democracy increasingly divided into reformist and revolutionary streams, a process of bifurcation that only intensified with the passage of time. However, even after 1917 radical (theoretically revolutionary) traditions in social democracy survived this process and were only to be extinguished by the onset of fascism (Hobsbawm, 2011, pp 6-7).

The radical rationalist Enlightenment tradition helped foster future conditions conducive to a socialist critique of society, elements of which could already be discerned in left Jacobinism, and inspired in part by Rousseau (Hobsbawm, 2011, pp 21-22). Eley further observes that “the [specific] term “socialism” only entered into general currency after 1850”; and the social component here started to imply “an idea of society as mutual co-operation” as opposed to one based on ‘individual competition’ (Eley, p 21). However, Kolakowski traces the term to the followers of Robert Owen and to Pierre Leroux, a devotee of Saint-Simon during the 1830s (Kolakowski, p 151).

Socialists became preoccupied with more than the extension of political democracy, or the extension of economic democracy in the form of co-operative, collective and social ownership and control. Further, as Hobsbawm insists, this also implied “equality” and “interference with property rights” (Hobsbawm, 2011, p 24).

Meanwhile, operating in the period 1864-1872 The International Workingmen’s Association, or the First International, was the first organisation of its kind to attempt international solidarity and co-ordination of strategy for the left and workers worldwide. The Marxists won the battle for control of the International for a time, although Hobsbawm contends that later on, Marx effectively wound up the organisation rather than lose control to the anarchists (Hobsbawm, 1996, pp 110-111; Joll, pp 52-53).

Until his death in 1865 Ferdinand Lassalle played a key early role organising the General German Workers’ Association, part of the nucleus around which future German social democracy and organised labour would coalesce. This was despite frankly irreconcilable differences between Lassalle and Marx on the orientation of the German workers’ movement, and the substance of internationalism and class struggle. Lassalle sought a specifically German and, more particularly, Prussian solution (Hobsbawm, 1996, p 111). These and other differences were to emerge publicly with the publishing in 1875 of Marx’s ‘Critique of the Gotha Programme’. Specifically, the Gotha Programme was a compromise document between Marx and the Lassalleans. Even after the deaths of both of Lassalle and Marx, Lassalle’s efforts to advance what
we can now interpret as a relative Third Way provide an example worthy of attention. (that is, as a consequence of Lassalle’s historical importance; including his organisational work; and his specific platform of co-operatives with state aid, universal suffrage, and strategic class collaboration)

Although the international socialist Left remained contained at the relative fringes, radicals had reason to believe the future may be theirs. At its peak the First International had attracted the support of many tens of thousands of workers throughout Europe – 35,000 in Vienna alone – and by 1877, the Social Democrats harnessed some half a million votes for a German parliament whose power was admittedly limited but this, even in the context of very limited suffrage (Hobsbawm, 1996, pp 108-115).

The Utopian Socialists

The consideration of left movements of this period will begin with a brief examination of the utopian socialists so as to establish Marxism’s debt to the utopians, but also their role in sowing the seeds for future socialist thought.

Many socialists might have been described as ‘utopian’ in the sense of promoting a detailed, speculative – and sometimes experimental – vision of an alternative future. Marx lists Owen, Fourier and Saint-Simon. Generally, though, the term ‘utopian’ has taken on a connotation of dismissal, and of people who ‘have their heads in the clouds’, but, as many authors have insisted, the utopians prepared the way for later socialism, including Marxism. Marx’s emphasis on politics being superseded by the administration of things can be traced to Saint-Simon, Owen, and Fourier; and the Saint-Simonians (like Marx and Engels) implied communal social organisation (Taylor, pp 4-5). Marx himself openly recognised the contribution of the utopians in his Manifesto, despite the fact that for those who followed him the term ‘utopian’ had degenerated into a term of derision.

Like Marx, the utopians placed their faith in science, and given this, it seems somewhat ironic the Marx would counter-pose their works against his interpretation of scientific socialism. Owen’s vision, still under the influence of the philosophical Enlightenment (and for some, the French Revolution) especially was one of the perfectibility of the human character. This he sought to address through systemic and universal education and the provision of an amenable environment. Therefore, as opposed to some violent rupture, Owen preferred gradual reform informed by reason, and social peace through co-operation (Taylor, pp 77-78).

In short, Saint-Simon’s was a radical, constructive, co-operative meritocracy in which, in Eley’s words, “rational and progressive centrality” was given to “all those performing productive functions, from industrialists to scientists and engineers,
professional men and labourers”. This necessitated an abolition of inheritance, for instance. “In the absence of aristocrats, kings and priests, these “industrialists” would replace privilege, competition, and laziness with functional hierarchy, mutualism and productivity” (Eley, p 27).

Saint-Simon was also an early advocate of economic planning who recognised the centrality of class struggle to progress. He was also the first to predict the eventual “absorption” of politics into economics, with the “government of men” being replaced by the “administration of things” (Hobsbawm, 2011, pp 28-29).

Taylor sees utopian socialism as being more generally embodied in the principles of association, community and co-operation (Taylor, pp 7-9). The principle of association was later to be promoted by Marx as a necessary condition of revolution; but for the likes of Owen, too, association through trade unions was essential in establishing bargaining power for workers. Co-operation suggested co-operative ownership (and perhaps control), but also the principle of co-operation, and could be realised along statist or non-statist lines. Hence, the rise of workers’ co-operatives and various mutualist associations.

In particular, Fourier and Owen stand out as resisting the telos of industrialisation: suggesting “phalanxes” (Fourier), or in the case of Owen, in effect democratic, small-scale semi-agricultural communes in the vicinity of 500 to 1,500 persons. Although Taylor insists, “Owen did not wish to halt the spread of mechanisation” and Cabet and Weitling (also later, Marx!) were more interested in realising the potential of emerging productive technology and methods with socialism on a large scale (Taylor, pp 92-96).

As Taylor observes, the utopians drew attention to such social problems as “acute poverty, disease, bad housing conditions, unemployment and illiteracy” (Taylor, p 30). Hence, Marx’s praise for the critical element contained within these varied movements. As Marx proclaims in the Manifesto: They “are full of the most valuable materials for the enlightenment of the working class” (Marx and Engels, Selected Works, Vol. I, pp 141-142). The charge made by Marxism, however, was that the utopians attempted experiments behind society’s back, or that they suggested an alternative future that in reality could only be achieved on the basis of capitalism’s maturation, and the rise of class struggle. Here history was presumed to be on the side of socialist transition as the proletariat were the emerging majority and were strategically placed as the true producers of wealth under capitalism (S. Bernstein, pp 66-67).

Importantly, the substance of Marx’s charge here against the utopians rested upon the notion that, as Hegel put it, “philosophy always comes too late and can only interpret a completed process”. Hence, Marx was sceptical and perhaps too sceptical of the
powers of human anticipation and imagination (Kolakowski, p 66). Marx’s criticisms of the utopians came to overshadow them overwhelmingly.

The plans of Owen, for instance, were logistically possible for the British state to realise, had England’s rulers had the inclination to do so. He had experienced initial success at the New Lanark mills – private concerns that he managed for a quarter of a century – though the failures of his experimental home colonies in the United States must have shaken the confidence of many (Taylor, pp 69-71, 76-77).

For Marx, though, the very possibility of change only arose from the material circumstances of the maturing class struggle. This distinguished him from certain utopians (e.g., Considerant) who instead emphasized the ideals of equality and liberty arising from the French Revolution (S. Bernstein, pp 60, 67).

While dissenting bourgeois intellectuals and benefactors might have provided important assistance in this process (Engels’s support for Marx not least of all), the majority of bourgeois were not interested in a social peace that required a rescission of either power or privilege, or in a questioning of the ideology that legitimised this. That is not to say that altruism – or collective political will – is dismissed, but following Taylor, it could be argued that the utopians did not appreciate the need for a social base upon which to ground their struggles and policies, and nor the difficulties in mobilising any such base. They all attempted to influence the powerful political and economic leaders of their day: Kings, emperors, prime ministers and businessmen, but without a solid class base, “successes were not consolidated”, and “no permanent centre of power was ever established”. (Taylor, p 35; S. Bernstein, n.d., p 48, p 60) This issue of a political base – and to this we may add economic and social bases – was also crucial to Marxism, and to dissenting Marxists’ critique of Bolshevism.

The differing brands of utopian socialism promulgated by Owen, Fourier, Saint-Simon were fading into the background by the time Marx began to develop a more mature outlook from 1848 onward. While it is attractive to consider the utopians in greater depth here, that would comprises a detour beyond the time frame. For current purposes the utopians’ influence on Marx is clear, and on later socialists who could be seen as having pursued Third Roads and Third Ways of the own.

**Identifying the Second Way**

Marx’s *The Communist Manifesto*, published in 1848 during a time of great revolutionary ferment, is the definitive statement of Marxist communism. Considered together with Engels’s *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, it provides the reader with a broad understanding of early Marxism’s essential tenets.
These writings, long considered as the Marxist canon, stand out as a kind of Second Way of revolutionary social democracy. While the writings of the Marxist centre (otherwise, orthodox Marxism) came to be overshadowed by the rise of Marxism-Leninism, the works and Marx and Engels themselves were not relegated to obscurity by the movement they spawned. Establishing the context of the Second Way during this period (1848-1880) can assist in considering the ways in which various Lassalleans, revisionists and others stood in contrast.

Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* was published in February 1848. The time of publishing was crucial as the 1848 revolutions followed soon after. Hobsbawm argues that the *Communist Manifesto* was likely ‘the most influential single piece of political writing since the French revolutionary “Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen’ (Hobsbawm, 2011, pp 102, 106-107). The *Manifesto* begins with the now-famous assertion: “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.” It was this class-struggle perspective that distinguished Marx from the utopians. For Marx, class struggle provided the real-world material base for socialist transition. It was grounded in real processes in history and in society, rather than a marginalised ideal.

Modern capitalism had arisen as the latest consequence of a series of revolutions in the modes of production and exchange spanning back to ancient times and early experiences of slavery. While manufacturing had replaced the guild system it was itself replaced by modern industry. Now spurred by new technology the modern bourgeoisie had emerged as “the leaders of whole industrial armies” (Marx and Engels, *Selected Works, Vol. I*, pp 113-114; Hobsbawm, 2011, p 33). Certainties and securities of Ages past were smashed for all the contending classes. The only nexus remaining “between man and man” was “naked self-interest” and “callous cash payment”. The illusions of the past were superseded by “naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation”. (Marx and Engels, *Vol. I*, p 115)

The industrial revolution was progressive also, overwhelming the remnants of feudalism and absolutism, and providing the material basis for a potentially better society. Competition, both international and between domestic capitalists demanded the constant revolutionising of the means and relations of production, producing a new social order. In a famous and evocative passage, Marx observes:

All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind (Marx and Engels, *Vol. I*, p 116).
Here we have an early intimation of Marxist dialectics: All social relations in a constant process of change and flux but with an underlying core process upon which everything hinges – a process animated by the class struggle at the heart of ever-evolving means of production – and for all the suffering unleashed by the industrial revolution, some supposed that the end of illusion held promise for a radically new society, of abundance and associated humanity ushering in a new history of happiness, plenty and peace.

In this context revolutionised communications and transport technology saw the preconditions for unprecedented growth in the world market, and in keeping with the structural demands of capitalism itself. Anticipating globalization, Marx observed how, with “intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations” the bourgeoisie “chased” “over the whole surface of the globe”. “On pain of extinction” in this new era of competition and empire, the bourgeois mode of production was adopted over the world. Advanced capitalist nations became increasingly cosmopolitan. There arose for the first time a “world literature” (Marx and Engels, *Vol. I*, p 116).

In this context, Marx announced the internationalism of the Communists, declaring: “The working men have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got” (Marx and Engels, *Vol. I*, pp 129-130). Marx’s internationalism was to put him at odds with later social democrats and also with the Lassalleans. However, the inverse side of the globalization announced by Marx was to include nationalism, imperialism, protectionism and war. Indeed, as Marx declared in explaining his concept of ideology: “The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class” (Marx and Engels, *Vol. I*, pp 116, 130). Nationalist ideology was to be deployed as a discourse of legitimisation, integration, mobilisation and social control long after Marx’s passing.

Marx writes that the modern bourgeoisie “is like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells” (Marx and Engels, *Vol. I*, p 18). There are “periodic crises” that convulse bourgeois society. In the midst of relative plenty there is overproduction, which the bourgeoisie responds to with ‘enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces’, “by the conquest of new markets” and “by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones” (Marx and Engels, *Vol. I*, pp 117-118).

Most important of all, the bourgeoisie had “called into existence … the modern working class”. In keeping with his supposition of class bifurcation, Marx writes:

In proportion as the bourgeoisie, i.e., capital, is developed, in the same proportion is the proletariat, the modern working class, developed – a class of labourers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital (Marx and Engels, *Vol. I*, p 119).
Yet, because the capital relationship depends in the last analysis not upon the individual capitalists but upon the workers collectively: “Capital is, therefore, not a personal [power], it is a social power” (Marx and Engels, Vol. I, p 126). In Marx’s schema, then, in appropriating these means of production collectively, the aim for the proletariat is to abolish the class nature of these relations – relations of domination and exploitation.

Here it is important also to establish that capitalism is that mode of production which is characterised by this form of property (i.e., capital); and the dominance of that class which overwhelmingly owns that capital. As such, capitalism should not be conflated with markets and other forms of personal and non-state ownership. The trick in conflating capitalism with markets underscores popular assumptions of capitalism as natural and eternal. With the extension of capitalist social and economic relationships, meanwhile, Marx made the further observation that skilled labour was progressively being replaced with monotonous wage labour in the factory. Hence, workers could no longer “find themselves” in the products of their labour but, rather, were “alienated” as if “an appendage of the machine”. This is a further development of his theory of alienation, intimated first in The German Ideology, where alienation was given rise to by the division of labour and the non-voluntary nature of work (Marx and Engels, Vol. I, pp 36-37). In Capital, Volume One, Marx also observes how “the labourer therefore constantly produces material, objective wealth, but in the form of capital, of an alien power that dominates and exploits him” (Marx in Kolakowski, p 232).

Hence workers “find themselves” only when they are outside of their labours. At work they are beholden to the capitalist, and they do not enjoy any sense of ownership or creative control. This alienation is compounded by the commodity fetishism that workers experience as consumers. As Kolakowski puts it:

The relation of the producers to the sum of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation existing not between themselves but between the products of their labour. (Kolakowski, p 226)

Here, according to Marx’s schema, wages are reduced to the mere “means of subsistence”, as the intensity of labour, and hence exploitation, increases. So, in keeping with Marx’s assumptions of immiseration and class bifurcation there is pauperisation, with the worker sinking deeper and deeper “below the conditions of existence of his own class” (Marx and Engels, Vol. I, pp 119, 124).

However, under conditions where “masses of labourers crowded into the factory are organised like soldiers”, the context is provided for the ever-expanding association and solidarity between workers. Class consciousness – collective consciousness of shared circumstances and interests – leads to an intensification of class struggle. In Marx’s words, this “replaces the isolation of the labourers due to competition, by their

For Marx, writing in 1848, the role of communists was to “point out the … common interests of the entire proletariat independently of all nationality”; to promote the “formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat”. Here, rather than promoting some utopian vision or plan Marx held that communists “merely express … actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes” (Marx and Engels, Vol. I, pp 124-125). Herein was the genesis of the divide between scientific and utopian socialism that thereafter was to characterise so much debate among Marxists through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Finally, Marx makes the aims of communists’ plain, stating that,

the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy. The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organised as the ruling class; and to increase the total productive forces as rapidly as possible (Marx and Engels, Vol. I, p 131).

The final consequence of this for Marx was that “the public power will lose its political character”; the political state, after all being the “organised power of one class for oppressing another”. Having abolished class distinction, “thereby [the proletariat will] have abolished its own supremacy as a class”. Under conditions of economic super-abundance, “the state as state” would “wither away”. Politics would be replaced by “the administration of things” (a notion developed by Engels, and before him by Saint-Simon) (Marx and Engels, Vol. I, pp 131-132).

Here it is interesting to note that Chantal Mouffe, a contemporary post-Marxist scholar rejects all notion of an end to the political. She speaks of the rise of apolitical technocracies under the aegis of Third Ways that seek to relegate political conflicts to the past on the basis of dialogue and consensus. By contrast, for Mouffe the political is “a space of power, conflict and antagonism” (Mouffe, 2005, pp 8-10).

Socialism: Utopian and Scientific

First compiled in 1880 and published in English in 1892, this work by Fredrick Engels comprised selections from his 1878 work Anti-Duhring: a critique of the neo-Kantian socialism of the German philosopher, Eugen Duhring. More specifically, Socialism: Utopian and Scientific comprised a summary of main Marxist positions on the development of materialist philosophy, Marxism’s critique of utopian socialism,
of dialectics, and of class struggle. *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* is important as a succinct statement of Marxist analysis, concepts, and categories.

Importantly, Marxism had developed in several stages, with intimations of Marx’s historical materialism as early as the 1840s with the ‘Theses on Feuerbach’, *The German Ideology* and the *Communist Manifesto* where Marx traced the connections between the social division of labour and the nature of class divisions, as well as the role the consequent antagonisms, alienation of labour and class struggles played in driving the epochal transformation of economy and society. It was from this historical materialist method that the idea of a scientific socialism was to emerge, developing ultimately into the hegemonic perspective on the radical Left.

Here Marx’s ideas rose to relative hegemony on the Left over decades: Developing via the conflicts within the First International; with the rise of the Eisenach movement in Germany from the late 1860s; and with the compromise Gotha Programme of the Social Democratic Party of Germany in 1875; though it was not until the Erfurt Programme that orthodox Marxism had its definitive and decisive victory over Lassalleanism. When originally published, Engels’s *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* saw off the challenge to Marxism from the neo-Kantians.

Much of Engels’s *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* simply re-iterates the position of *Manifesto*. Therefore, the following discussion will seek to avoid replicating the substance of those areas already analysed in the consideration of that text, except where Engels expresses something especially well or adds something new. Consideration of this text and where relevant, Marx’s *The German Ideology* can help clarify both the sources and substance of scientific socialism. To begin with, Engels makes several important observations in the ‘Special Introduction to the English Edition of 1892’ (i.e., of *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*) that are worthy of analysis, and most importantly because they provide support for arguments as to the principles of materialism and history-in-motion as the basis for socialist science.

As opposed to epistemological scepticism, for Engels, *practical* success in our interactions with the world provides “positive proof” that our sense perceptions “agree with reality outside ourselves” (Marx and Engels, *Selected Works III*, p 101). This emphasis on practicality is typical of Marxist analysis, and responding to the neo-Kantians Engels claims that with modern science “ungraspable things have been grasped”. With progress in chemistry Engels prophesises that organic life may one day be creatable by man (Marx and Engels, *Selected Works III*, p 102). To illustrate his argument Engels argues:

> If you know all the qualities of a thing, you know the thing itself; nothing remains but the fact that the said thing exists without us; and when your senses have taught you that fact, you have grasped the last remnant of the thing-in-itself. (Marx and Engels, *Selected Works III*, p 102)
Both Engels and Marx come to reject important epistemological and metaphysical questions – for a “practical” outlook. Yet, did Engels really know all he claimed to know? He mentions ‘the British schoolman, Duns Scotus [who] asked “whether it was impossible for matter to think?”’ Even in the twenty-first century, can we claim all ungraspable things have been grasped? Thus, Engels observes: “In order to effect this miracle [Scotus] took refuge in God’s omnipotence, that is, he made theology preach materialism” (Marx and Engels, Selected Works III, pp 97-98). Yet, without resort to God – or at least Cartesian dualism – Engels cannot explain either consciousness or free will.

Indeed, Marx himself notes in The German Ideology (1846): “Religion is from the outset consciousness of the transcendental arising from actually existing forces”. (Marx & Engels, Selected Works I, p 83). While for the most part among Marxists historically those questions have been abandoned as being non-practical, these uncertainties were to provide the source of significant controversy between the neo-Kantians and those socialists who engaged with them, including Bernstein and the Austro-Marxists. Important here is to establish the disposition of Marx and Engels towards materialism, both philosophic and practical.

**The Foundations of the Marxist ‘Scientific Method’**

For Hegel and later for Marx, a central task of theory was “to trace out the inner law running through all its apparently accidental phenomenon” (Marx and Engels, Selected Works III, p 130). Hegel saw this inner law as comprising the evolution of the Idea; that is, the essentially spiritual (and mental) historic journey towards freedom – of absolute mind – where it could be said that mind, or the Idea, comprises the structure, and the material world, the superstructure. That is, the material world is dependent upon the Idea and not vice versa.

This final destination of absolute mind comprises freedom from contingency in that while individual conscious is finite, in the absolute it achieves infinity. And yet, the idea, on its journey towards absolute mind, maintains its “richness” through the process of “sublation” (Aufheben). Hence, in a logical spiral moving progressively from one negation and synthesis to another, that negation is not one of annihilation but of assimilation, driven by mutual penetration of thesis and antithesis (i.e., mediation). Here the past stages are preserved in the new stages “at a higher plane”, and even at the destination point of absolute mind; absolute mind may be interpreted as union with God, total self-knowledge, recovery of essence (Kolakowski, pp 48-52; pp 63-67).

The development of the family, the state and all social forms therefore occurs as a teleological historical process that is driven by this unfolding or becoming of the idea,
and not by material contradictions arising from the mode of production. However, the journey towards absolute idea or absolute mind suggests interconnectedness in a transcendence of individual mind to a state of spiritual and mental totality (absolute knowledge/consciousness). Hence, collectivism is implicit in Hegel. Against this, there is our intuitive sense of ourselves as individuals, and the sense that amidst the various synthetic parts that contribute to our emotions, our identity and memory, our consciousness and the ways in which we perceive existence: that at the deepest level we are individual souls regardless of our interconnectedness.

Hegel had framed much of his philosophy in the context of religion. Indeed, he sought to reconcile permanently religion and philosophy. More specifically, his idealisation of Christianity and the state, and with it the assumption in his Philosophy of Right that “the real is the rational” (Kolakowski, p 55) was adapted as a useful legitimising instrument for the Prussian authorities.

Later on, critics were to assault Marxism with the charge that underlying Hegelian assumptions in its framework of understanding provided an excuse for oppression, on the grounds that it has been historically necessary in the process of social evolution. Contrary to this Hegel might be interpreted as assuming that while specific parts of the historical process are necessary, they are not always desirable or just. Hence, Marx deplored the inhumanities of capitalism but in Hegelian fashion supposed the capitalist phase to be necessary to create the preconditions for socialism. Yet, Hegel can also be interpreted as urging individuals to quest after what is necessary for the achievement of freedom (Kolakowski, p 56).

Indeed, as Kolakowski observes, for Hegel “state violence could [not] fulfil the demands and requirements of Reason” and, therefore, coercion suggested an “immature” society (Kolakowski, pp 62-63). Though Marx was to follow Hegel in his historicism, giving rise to fears of moral relativism as a rationale for oppression (Kolakowski, p 64).

Following Hegel’s death in 1831, however, there arose a movement of Young Hegelians, which David McLelllan has described as a movement of “speculative rationalism” and which, inspired by Hegelian dialectics and the French Revolution, saw “reason as a continually unfolding process”. Here philosophy was the rational and superior successor to religion, rather than its edifying counterpart, and rather than mediation between opposites – as with Hegel himself – the Young Hegelians came to emphasize the importance of radical negation, further setting the scene for Marx’s theory (McLellan, pp 6-8, 18).

Interestingly, one Young Hegelian, August Cieszkowski, developed a “theory of action”. Instead of mere contemplation, he advocated action to actually change the world. However, he broke with Feuerbach on the theme of materialism, and this may have informed his voluntarism. Arguably, he helped to inspire Marx’s classic maxim:
“The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it” (Kolakowski, pp 71, 72). Although Marx also broke with those Young Hegelians who posited the existence of a “free spirit” and hence radical voluntarism. Instead, he suggested “praxis”, that consciousness arises through the historical process itself, and hence could not be pre-empted and anticipated by Reason (Kolakowski, p 87).

In the years preceding the 1848 liberal and nationalist revolutions, various Young Hegelians came out openly in favour of democracy and republicanism, and some ultimately, for humanist communism. Foreshadowing his future preoccupation with worldly injustice, Marx himself provided a critique of poverty among Moselle vine-growers. In this Marx was certainly influenced by Feuerbach’s emphasis on the sensual world. Further, though, here he was in conflict with some Young Hegelians such as Bruno Bauer. While some imagined the most important struggle was to free humanity from the perceived religious illusion, which they believed to be degrading, Marx was developing a perspective on freedom that emphasized class-based oppression and alienation stemming from the division of labour. The repression and collapse of the Young Hegelian movement that followed most likely also influenced Marx’s future views on the futility of sectarianism, and the need for a real social grounding of any movement pertaining to the advance of radical change (McLellan, pp 30-32, 47; Kolakowski, pp 96-98). Grasping Marx’s critique of Feuerbach and other Young Hegelians is a key to discerning the origins of scientific socialism.

**Responding to Hegel and the Young Hegelians**

Engels’s rendition of dialectical materialism in *Anti-Dühring* comprises a relatively concise rendition of his and Marx’s broad social scientific framework. And to begin with it is essential to note that Marx and Engels’s dialectical materialism varies radically from Hegel and the Young Hegelians in that he and Marx unambiguously privilege the material world – *and the concrete struggles therein* – over the world of ideas. Marx and Engels apply the dialectical method to the material world, with special emphasis on the class struggle and the mode of production (Marx and Engels *Selected Works, Vol. III*, p 98; Joll p 51).

In *Anti-Dühring*, Engels follows the Greek philosopher Democritus in holding that science “is based on experience, and consists in subjecting the data furnished by the senses to a rational method of investigation. Induction, analysis, comparison, observation, experiment, are the principal forms of such a rational method” (Marx and Engels *Selected Works, Vol. III*, p 98). This is compatible with Engels’s analysis of materialist philosophy and of idealism. As opposed to any static materialism, therefore, Engels asserts that:
Among the qualities inherent in matter, motion is the first and foremost, not only in the form of mechanical and mathematical motion, but chiefly in the form of an impulse, a vital spirit, a tension … of matter (Marx and Engels *Selected Works, Vol. III*, p 98).

Hence the perspective of “ancient Greek philosophy … first clearly formulated by Heraclitus: everything is and is not, for everything is fluid, is constantly changing, constantly coming into being and passing away” (Marx and Engels *Selected Works, Vol. III*, p 127).

This, then, is a simple rendition of dialectics from Engels:

Dialectics, on the other hand, comprehends things and their representations, ideas, in their essential connection, concatenation, motion, origin, and ending.

Furthermore:

“Nature is proof of dialectics” working “dialectically, not metaphysically” and moving “not in the eternal oneness of a perpetually recurring circle, but goes through a real historical evolution.” (Marx and Engels *Selected Works, Vol. III*, pp 128-129)

To provide proof of this, Engels turns to human biology. With regard to the human body, “every moment it assimilates matter supplied from without”, “and gets rid of other matter”; “at every moment … the same and not the same”; “every organic being is always itself, and yet something other than itself” (Marx and Engels *Selected Works, Vol. III*, pp 128-129). Kolakowski explains it as follows. The “truth” of seed is a tree. This is a kind of logic – and applies to both the idealistic schema of Hegel and the materialist schema of Marx. It is a way of thinking, as well as the logic that Hegel and Marx perceive at work in the world. It is a logic that attempts to grasp the world through its movement as a totality; specifically, through the relation of the whole to its parts (Kolakowski, p 51). Engels also explains how: “[The] two poles of an antithesis, positive and negative, … are as inseparable as they are opposed”; “they mutually interpenetrate”. In the totality, therefore, “causes and effects are eternally changing places, so that what is effect here and now will be cause there and then, and vice versa”. (Marx and Engels *Selected Works, Vol. III*, pp 128-129)

Engels further develops this materialist outlook with his famous division of society into base and superstructure. Hence, as opposed to Hegel and the Young Hegelians:

[The] economic structure of society always furnishes the real basis, starting from which we can alone work out the ultimate explanation of the whole superstructure of juridical and political institutions, as well as of the religious,
philosophical, and other ideas of a given historical period. (Marx and Engels Selected Works, Vol. III, p 132)

Finally, Engels attempts to specify the substance of historical materialism as the basis of socialism as science: scientific socialism. Thus, he summarized historical materialism as designating,

that view of the course of history which seeks the ultimate cause and the great moving power of all important historic events in the economic development of society, in the changes in the modes of production and exchange, in the consequent division of society into distinct classes, and in the struggle of these classes against one another. (Marx and Engels Selected Works, Vol. III, p 103)

It is also instructive to consider Marx’s original responses to Hegelianism and to the Young Hegelians in particular. ‘Theses on Feuerbach’ (1845) and The German Ideology (1846) comprise the relevant texts, the origins of Marx’s dialectical materialism as contrasted with Hegelian idealism and the contemplative materialism of Feuerbach in particular.

In essence Marx accused the Young Hegelians of idealism for their apparent supposition that “conceptions, thoughts, ideas, in fact all the products of consciousness” and especially religion enjoy an independent existence. In contrast, Marx proposes his materialist conception of history, which starts with the assumption not just of consciousness but the social nature of humanity in organising its material means of subsistence through labour. With the progress of history and the development of productive forces thereafter, in the context of private ownership and the evolving and increasing division of labour, this socio-economic dynamic gives rise to shifting social cleavages on the basis of class.

Here men and women “work under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will”. Hence, according to this world view: “It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness” (Marx and Engels Selected Works, Vol. I, pp 19-22, 25-26). The consequence of this is that “real liberation” is possible, “only in the real world and by real means”; it is a “historical and not a mental act”, based on the development of the means and the mode of production, and ultimately, the abolition of the division of labour. This, in turn, is held to enable “personal freedom”, not of isolated individuals but through mutual “association” providing “the means of cultivating [our] gifts in all directions” (Marx and Engels Selected Works, Vol. I, pp 27-28, 68).

Further, real liberation was not to be merely political but also social. Hence, for Marx, man’s essence was social, and not spiritual. (though again, we may argue that there remain some ways in which we remain alone; that is, we only know our own consciousness; and this is an important facet of human experience)
Here much of the superstructure takes the form of ideology; according to Marx the ruling ideas of every epoch were, in fact, the ideas of the ruling class, and in Marx’s words, the dominant material force here was also the dominant intellectual force. Moreover, the consequently dominant ideas – representing the dominant interests – are passed off as “the common interest … expressed in ideal form”. Not only are these ideas presented as being “rational”, they are held to be “universally valid”. However, these ideas do not arise outside or above society but arise from material conditions of domination (Marx and Engels *Selected Works, Vol. I*, pp 49-50).

In response to those who claimed the (bourgeois) state to be a the vehicle for the general interest, Marx indicates the state’s alienation from the actual needs of *particular individuals*, most particularly those of the proletarians (but arguably also the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie). Hence, individual liberation – manifest as freedom from alienating labour and freedom to find ourselves through creative labour – depended upon social liberation. Under capitalism the state does not mediate between interests, but defends the interests of the ruling classes (Kolakowski, p 102). However, later on, Marx was to suggest the possibility of relative autonomy with his ‘The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte’ (1852).

**Elaborating on Dialectical Materialism**

As we have seen with regard to the Marxist schema, first there is materialism, practical and philosophical. Second is the dialectical approach, but inverted from the Hegelian idealist form to focus instead upon the practical, sensuous, material world. Third is the focus upon the evolving means and mode of production and progressing class struggle as the core dialectical process in history, providing the economic structure upon which the cultural and ideological superstructure rests.

Importantly, this is an *abstraction* of the social process, but for Marx is it a *necessary* abstraction for grasping the movement of society and economy as a whole. Here social relationships can be seen to develop their own laws of movement, and these are grasped by moving from the abstract to the concrete. Yet, perhaps given that all perception and understanding are only partial, all of our intellectual constructions fail to fully grasp totality, including those of the Marxists. To grasp totality is something to be strived for but can never be fully achieved in the last instance.

Fourth is the chief claim of Marxism and contrary to idealism, is its claim to focus upon the possibilities latent under present material conditions, and its effective insistence that the horizon imposed by these material conditions cannot simply be overcome by force of free will or by virtue of the imagination. This refers not merely to the possibilities imaginable within the confines of the present means of production and their development, but also that which is possible in light of the development of
the class struggle – the balance of class forces locally and globally, and the status of
the state (and to this we might add the possibility of hostile or friendly states).

Finally, for Marx the proletariat is the “universal class”. Through the social conditions
of capitalism the proletariat achieves “true consciousness”; that is (as Kolakowski
puts it), “awareness of interests and the direction of human history” (Kolakowski, pp
143-145). As opposed to Hegelian notions of spiritual reconciliation, for Marx
redemption (or conciliation) is achieved in the world and through the world. Man is
essentially finite, but he finds himself through communism; through communism he
rediscovers his essence, which had been lost through various class societies, and
through the division of labour. He recovers his species being.

These are the essential ingredients of the worldview of Marxist scientific socialism as
developed in such works as The German Ideology, The Communist Manifesto and
Socialism: Utopian and Scientific.

**Conclusion**

The claims alluded to above also underline the reluctance of Marx and Engels and
those who followed in their tradition to speculate as to the specifics of any future
socialist society. Apart from anything else, Marxism lays down general principles of
analysis but its application must necessarily differ from country to country, from
context to context through history. One can see clearly here the possible
interpretations of determinism and economism resorted to by the orthodox Marxists in
the face of the Bolshevik revolution. If anything, the experience of Bolshevism
illustrated the possibility of a path to socialism at variance with the assumptions of
orthodox Marxism. The Bolsheviks and Stalinists’ swimming against the tide of
history – harnessing collective will to the ends of forced industrialisation – came at
such a terrible cost.

Hence Marxism and socialism are seen by many to be discredited by the very
movements of Bolshevism, and then Stalinism, which themselves defied central
Marxist tenets regarding the preconditions of socialism. Thus, it is necessary to
present a clearer vision of the manifest possibilities of socialism; a response to the
many and varied dystopian visions of socialist society. The development of the means
of communication can provide the basis either for our freedom or our enslavement in
a bad totality, and perhaps with no way out (Adorno, Beilharz).

Here, again, it is interesting to return to Chantal Mouffe and her critique of dialectics,
whether idealistic or materialistic. Mouffe argues:

Society is not to be seen as the unfolding of a logic exterior to itself, whatever
the source of this logic could be: forces of production, development of what
Hegel called the Absolute Spirit, laws of history, etc. Every order is the temporary and precarious articulation of contingent practices. The frontier between the social and the political is essentially unstable and requires constant displacements and renegotiations between social agents. (Mouffe, *On the Political*, pp 17-18, 2005)

Thus is the picture that emerges in a study of the development of socialist theory during the period 1848 to 1880. The utopians are crucial for the influence they hold on future theorists, including Marx himself, but as the so-called utopians recede in their relative significance and prominence, Marxism gradually emerges as the Second Way or hegemonic revolutionary discourse. The Marxist position is developed through the 1840s with the ‘Theses on Feuerbach’ and *The German Ideology* (though not released until much later), and most famously with the *Communist Manifesto*. These contain the historical materialist seeds of the future scientific socialism, which Engels elucidates clearly later on with his famous *Anti-Dühring* in 1877.

In his time, Marx came to be well known in the relatively undeveloped European left community. Engels was crucial in popularising Marx’s legacy, and devoted himself to the cause of global socialist *organisation*. Hence, Engels was known affectionately as ‘the General’. To summarise, in Eley’s words: “The period between [the] publication of Engels’s *Anti-Dühring* in 1877 and his death in 1895 saw the transition, so to speak, from Marx to Marxism” (Eley, pp 33-37, pp 41-42). The baton was passed on to Karl Kautsky after Engels own passing, with the socialist movement exploding in size and relevance during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Having established the content of the scientific socialist Second Way of Marx and Engels, the next chapter considers the life and works of Lassalle: one of the founders of German Social Democracy, and an original theorist who grappled with themes including universal suffrage, and co-operatives with state aid.
Chapter Two:

The Lassallean Third Way

The object of this chapter is an analysis of the Third Way of Lassalleanism, which was pivotal in the early development of the German Left. This chapter works to trace the origins of Lassalle’s movement and the ways in which his philosophy comprised a socialist Third Way. Thereafter I will provide an account of the personal life of Lassalle and of his political activism. Here I will draw from Eduard Bernstein and David Footman who were among the most important critics of Lassalle. Also drawing from Bernstein and Footman (and from Lassalle himself), I will consider Lassalle’s important political works separately. In this context, we will consider important opposing themes in Lassalle’s life and works. The underlying theme for this chapter is that Lassalleanism comprised one of the first socialist Third Ways; and that through his writing and political activism he left a valuable legacy, not least of all in the way certain themes were treated in his work.

Lassalle (1825-1864) was to be deeply influenced by the Hegelian doctrine early in his life. He developed an interest in radical politics, and later briefly participated in the 1848 revolutions in Europe. (Footman pp 40-41, pp 62-63) During his brief life Lassalle wrote extensively about legal theory, philosophy, international politics and even tried his hand at being a playwright. ((Footman, pp vii-xx)

Eduard Bernstein traces Lassalle’s ‘socialist Damascus’ to Paris in 1844 where “the tide of the socialist movement was running very high”. (Bernstein, n.d., pp 34-41) But Footman claims it was Lassalle’s later study of Hegel at university that led to his embrace of socialism, ”within the limits of Hegelian evolutionary idealism”. Change was not to come, therefore, according to Footman, “as a consequence of barricades, of risings or conspiracies but in the train of the inevitable triumph of the Hegelian Idea”, and disseminated inevitably and in good time via culture and philosophy (Footman, p 36, 38). Importantly, while a Left Hegelian, Lassalle was not a Young Hegelian. That is - he was not part of that intellectual movement arising from around 1840 which sought to radicalise Hegel in their critique of religion as self-alienation amongst other things. Unlike Marx they emphasised the power of Ideas rather than the primacy of the material. (Kolakowski, p 195, McLellan (1980), pp 6-9).

In 1861, Lassalle threw himself fully into socialist agitation. However, he shifted between the themes of conflict and conciliation. In the context of a constitutional
struggle between the liberal parliament and the royalist Prussian state, Lassalle attempted to out-manoeuvre the liberals by dealing directly with Bismarck. While Lassalle’s aims included universal suffrage, producer-co-operatives with state aid and a German republic, critics such as Eduard Bernstein later condemned his conciliatory strategies.

Lassalle’s historic appeal to authority is notable in contrast to the Marxist doctrine of a stage-based class struggle; and Lassalle’s attempt to outflank the bourgeoisie through this strategy is notable in contrast to the common left strategy of first establishing a united front for liberal democracy with the liberal bourgeoisie. His positioning can be traced both to his Hegelianism and to his strategic mindset.

Lassalle’s personal socialist agitation arose in the context of the constitutional struggle. The overall context also included the authoritarian royalist Prussian state, counterposed by a working class only in the infancy of its conscious organisation. Though Lassalle personally was not to live to see his efforts come to full fruition, the Lassallean movement was to assist in the future rise of the Social Democratic Party in Germany.

With the Erfurt Programme of 1891, the Marxists in the German social-democratic movement were to feel confident enough to break with Lassalleanism, and their case was strengthened by the posthumous release of Marx’s own ‘Critique of the Gotha Programme’ and Eduard Bernstein’s critique of Lassalle (‘Ferdinand Lassalle as a Social Reformer’) which I draw liberally from in this chapter.

With Lassalle dying tragically in 1864, the Lassallean movement outlived Lassalle himself. It is possible, also, that Lassalle’s influence on Bismarck provided an inspiration for the latter’s state socialism or practical Christianity in the 1880s. The context of royalist authoritarianism was to persist in Germany until the revolution of 1918-19, but after Lassalle’s death German working-class organisation was to grow steadily. These pressures most likely also influenced Bismarck.

The following sections provide brief biographical background, followed by an account of his political agitation, and then a more detailed account of his works.

**Lassalle’s Life and Times**

Diary entries from 1840 provided by Lassalle’s biographer, David Footman, reveal a young Lassalle concerned plainly with his own class interests. Hence, he declares simply: “Had I been born a prince I would have been an aristocrat heart and soul. As it is I am one of the middle classes, and, therefore, a democrat” (Footman, pp 19-20). As an adult, in 1846 Lassalle made the acquaintance of the Countess Sophie von Hatzfeldt, whom he represented in a legal fight with her husband over their marriage
Footman writes: “Old scandals were raked up and embellished. Witnesses were bought, suborned or terrorised” (Footman, p 55).

Marx was unimpressed with Lassalle’s dedication to the von Hatzfeldt case as well as his various intrigues with spies and diplomats (Footman, pp 78-81). At this time, as suggested by his work, ‘The Italian War’, Lassalle was also active in supporting the revolutionary, Garibaldi and the cause of Italian nationalism. He and his co-conspirators believed they could isolate Austria as well as promote German unification (Footman, pp 129-132).

Approaching the close of 1861 a constitutional conflict between Liberals and Prussian Absolutism gathered place over the issue of army reform, around conscription, army organisation and the like. Lassalle responded to the crisis with two important speeches: ‘The Working Class and its Significance in the Present Age’, and ‘The Nature of Constitutions’ (Footman, pp 134-136). Lassalle’s promotion of an independent working-class party infuriated liberals who saw such an agenda as a distraction from the immediate struggle, and perhaps as a provocation that could only harm their cause (Footman, p 139).

Lassalle responded to what he perceived as the timidity of the liberals in Prussia, comparing their prospects to that of slaves in ancient Rome who enjoyed liberty once a year at the festival of Saturnalia. In contrast Lassalle asserts:

> When Spartacus and his men raised the banner of the slave insurrection in Rome in order to make free men of slaves he was doing more than engaging in Saturnalian festivities. (Lassalle, pp 59-61)

‘The Working Class and its Significance in the Present Age’ was later republished as *The Worker’s Programme* (Footman, p 143). Impressed by this workers’ programme a number of labour activists approached Lassalle about leading a new movement (Footman, pp 155-157). Lassalle was to respond to this call with another work, ‘The Open Answer’, published later in 1863. Lassalle’s openly professed vision around this time revolved mainly around the proposal for workers’ co-operatives with state aid, but privately Lassalle was considering rather more radical options. Lassalle wrote to his friend, the influential economist Johann Karl Rodbertus on 28 April 1863:

> That private ownership of land and capital is to be abolished, that has been the inner kernel of my conviction ever since I began to think about economic matters … True one cannot tell the mob that now, and that is why I avoided mention of it in my pamphlet. But I believe State credit for co-operatives is the first little step. (Lassalle in Footman, p 169)

Further, on 30 April Lassalle provides the rationale for his strategy:
Without universal suffrage, i.e., a practical instrument with which to enforce our demands, we might grow into a philosophical school or a religious sect. But never into a political party. (Lassalle in Footman, p 169)

A meeting at Leipzig endorsed ‘The Open Answer’ ‘by 1,350 votes against two, and a new committee was set up to organise the formation of a General German Workers’ Association’ (Footman, p 171). Within three months, the association had mobilised 900 members. At Lassalle’s own request he was provided with “dictatorial” powers (Bernstein, n.d., pp 180-181). In fact, Lassalle’s tactics demanded dictatorship of a sort, as he had to be in a position to deliver the support of the German workers to the powers with which he was dealing. That is – to deliver proletarian support to the Crown against a ‘liberal bourgeoisie’ that refused to consider free, universal and equal suffrage. He needed to be seen as “a power to be treated with” (Bernstein, n.d., p 211). But without the organised working class having developed and matured sufficiently, he was fighting an uphill battle.

During these final years of his life in which he pursued the cause of building the General German Workers’ Association – and starting in May 1863 – Lassalle was to meet with Prince von Bismarck four times (Footman, p 175). Bernstein observes that some “in Government circles” were considering whether the “social question” could be used as a wedge to “break up the Progressivist majority in the Chamber” (Bernstein, n.d., p 201), but Lassalle’s organisation as yet was not that strong.

An idea of Lassalle’s style of approach to Bismarck can perhaps be gleaned from the following excerpt – a part of a letter from Lassalle to Bismarck from 8 June 1863:

> the working class is instinctively inclined to dictatorship if it feels that such will be exercised in working class interests [and thus workers would] be prepared to see in the Crown the natural bearer of a social dictatorship in contradiction to the egoism of bourgeois society. [If the] Crown … could make up its mind to adopt a really revolutionary and national attitude; and become a social, revolutionary and popular monarchy instead of a monarchy of the privileged classes. (Lassalle in Footman, p 179)

At the same time, though, Lassalle remained committed, as in a letter to Bismarck, to “universal suffrage” and an “alliance [of the Crown] with the people” (Footman, p 179). Lassalle wrote later, on 11 June, to the Countess Sophie von Hatzfeldt, whom he had represented in the legal contest in 1848:

> It is easy to guess Bismarck’s real intention. As I told you last year he has always wanted to put through the social part of our workers’ programme, but not the political part. (Lassalle in Footman, p 201)
Evidently, Lassalle assumed that by providing support to Bismarck against the liberals, and by supporting Prussian expansion into Schleswig-Holstein he could secure free, equal and universal suffrage (Lassalle in Footman, p 212).

Reflecting many decades later Eduard Bernstein made his opinion of Lassalle’s strategy clear:

> He was playing with the reaction; believed he was using it for his own ends, and that at a given moment he could shake it off with one wrench … [But there was] a logic of facts which is stronger than even the strongest individual will … [In reality Bismarck could] command the greatest number of really powerful factors; [and hence] in the long run Lassalle should become Bismarck’s ‘delegate’ rather than Bismarck his (Bernstein, n.d., pp 204-205).

Yet, Lassallean Jakob Altmaier attempted to uphold Lassalle’s revolutionary credentials. He observed that it was Lassalle, indeed, who: “After the delivery of a speech at Frankfurt” had argued: ‘Whenever I say “general suffrage right” you must understand me as meaning “revolution” and “revolution” and again “revolution”!’ (Lassalle, pp 16-17).

Even though Lassalle became somewhat disillusioned with his lack of substantial progress regarding universal suffrage and his other core goals, there can be no denying that his movement was gaining momentum. Footman notes an association meeting on 23 May 1864, held in the Rhineland with Lassalle as the speaker: “He had established himself with the Rhineland workers as a local hero. For every ten men willing to become paying members there were hundreds, if not thousands, ready to attend his meetings” (Footman, pp 201-203). Yet, Lassalle was increasingly frustrated by his slow progress. In a letter that proved revealing of his mindset at the time, Lassalle had written to his confidant, Countess Hatzfeld of politics:

> Truly I would burn as passionately for them as ever if there were anything serious to be done, or if I had the power, or saw the means to bring it about … for without supreme power nothing can be done. (Lassalle in Bernstein, n.d., p 220)

Fellow revolutionary Johann Phillip Becker had written that Lassalle’s problem was his impatience, his desire for immediate success rather than a struggle that would “take decades” (Bernstein, n.d., p 221). Moreover, Eduard Bernstein concluded in 1891 that Lassalle’s socialist agitation was a “doubly two-edged weapon”. While his works “won over hundreds of thousands to Socialism”, those who claimed to follow in Lassalle’s tradition exploited his legacy to turn the masses against republicanism: as if all republics were somehow essentially _bourgeois_ republics (Bernstein, n.d., pp 224-225).
Hence, it is popular sentiment in favour of Lassalle as the “good socialist” – the “patriotic” socialist – that Bernstein sets out to root out in his work. ‘Ferdinand Lassalle as a Social Reformer’). (Bernstein (1891), pp 7-8), Most likely Bernstein decided upon this position both to prevent the misuse of the Lassalle legend in rationalising the reaction, but also to consolidate the orthodox Marxist hegemony on the German Left.

**Lassalle’s Urgent, Pragmatic Idealism**

For the purposes of this thesis, here we will mainly concern ourselves with Lassalle’s ‘The Workers’ Program’, otherwise known as the ‘Working Class Programme’ and ‘The Open Answer’, otherwise known as ‘The Open Reply’.

Momentarily it is worthwhile considering the meaning of Lassalle’s other works, including Bernstein’s opinion on their relevance. Engaging in a reading of Lassalle’s ‘The Philosophy of Heraclitus the Obscure of Ephesus’, Bernstein asserts that from ‘Hegel’s cult of the idea of the State’ Lassalle thus derived his preference for state-centred solutions to the social problem. Further, and from this, there is the idea of the state as representing the universal: whereas for Marx the state was based upon a foundation of *particular class interests*. Bernstein also suggests such a concept of the state is at odds with democracy, which for Danish historian G. Brandes expresses the rule of “the formal will of the individual”. Indeed Brandes held that this is a contradiction that “no one can harbour without taint” (Bernstein, n.d., pp 46-47).

In considering the early Lassalle we begin to gain an appreciation of the clashing theoretical foundations of himself, and of Marx and Bernstein. Importantly, Lassalle’s ideas and the movement that followed him comprised one of the first relative socialist Third Ways: A left alternative to both the bourgeois ideology and the Marxist doctrine. The movement was strong enough that years after Lassalle’s own death the Marxist Eisenachers felt compelled to compromise with the Lassalleans in the framing of the first German social-democratic programme at Gotha in 1875. The programme included reference to the “iron law of wages”, as well as producer cooperatives with state aid – both Lassallean concepts.

Lassalle was at odds with Marxism in several other important respects. His political socialism envisaged a state power that could be largely autonomous from the economic base. Indeed, it could be argued that in Lassalle’s view it was the political that was the dominant factor. This followed after Hegel himself, for whom the state comprised the vehicle for the mediation of particular interests, the reconciliation of “the subjective will with universal Reason” and the realisation of human freedom. Because of this, for Hegelians – including Lassalle – contra-Marx, there would always be a central role for the state (Kolakowski, pp 61-62).
Lassalle’s emphasis on the political also found expression with his language of a ‘fourth estate’, defined as much in juridical and political terms as in those of economic class relations. For Lassalle, this fourth estate was the bearer of the universal interest, and of universal reconciliation.

For Lassalle, his predicted reconciliation would do “away with all the contradictions in every circle of society” and this was to be achieved by “universal and direct suffrage”, through a democracy in which a wide basis of participation would prove inherently self-corrective (Lassalle in Fried and Sanders, p 379-381). This theme of reconciliation stands in clear contrast to Marx’s radical negation, and even if Marx can be read as promoting the proletariat as the bearer of the conciliation of all humanity upon the transition to communism.

However, the precondition of revolution here was still class consciousness and class solidarity, the product of which would be “the development of the Idea, with the advances of civilisation, with the life principle of history itself, which is nothing more or less than the growth of freedom” (Lassalle, p 81). Through left-Hegelian glasses, for Lassalle the fourth estate is the necessary agent of history – the collective agent through which the unfolding idea becomes manifest in the world. Thus Lassalle’s account of the fourth estate and of the working class in The Workers’ Programme:

[By striving] after the improvement of their condition as a class … instead of opposing the movement of history [the fourth estate] assume[s] a direction which thoroughly accords with the development of the whole people, with the victory of the Idea, with the advance of culture, with the living principle of history itself, which is no other than the development of freedom. (Lassalle in Fried and Sanders, p 385)

Whereas for Marx the state usually was taken as being derived from the economic, Lassalle posits a state power enjoying a great degree of independence. Rather than being essentially an engine of bourgeois class despotism, the Lassallean state holds the promise of universal conciliation and liberation (both from class-based exploitation and oppression as well as from material deprivation and ignorance). This view of the state is of central importance in distinguishing Lassalle’s state philosophy from the perspective of Marx, for whom true liberation would finally arise with the dismantling of the state as state. That is, where the state is seen not as an enabling power, but simply as the guarantor of class power, exploitation, and interest.

Like Marx, Lassalle viewed the existing state as the representative of class interests. Yet, his aim was a political revolution so as to transform the state in order to comprise the embodiment and the representative of ‘the universal interest’, a vehicle for conciliation and for freedom from want.
Again, in Lassalle’s vision, true equality would be achieved in the shape of producer co-operatives, formed with the assistance of state aid. In his famous condemnation of a minimalist state; otherwise a night watchman’s state:

the bourgeoisie conceives the moral purpose of the State as consisting only in the duty to protect the personal liberty of the individual and his property. ... This is a policeman’s idea, gentlemen … whose sole function consists … in preventing theft. (Lassalle, p 83)

This is effectively posited as the only reason for the bourgeois state’s existence. But by contrast with such a minimalist vision, a state built,

under the dominion of the idea of the working class … would … bring about an elevation of the spirit, the production of a sum total of happiness, culture, well-being and liberty that have had no parallel in the world’s history. (Lassalle, p 84)

Lassalle’s concept of freedom is, therefore, intricately tied to his treatment of the state. For Lassalle the state is the political form adopted by collective humanity in its struggle with nature (and not only as a product of the class struggle). Lassalle depicts this struggle with nature as being one with the “misery, the ignorance, the poverty and consequently slavery” that characterised human existence since the earliest times. As against the bourgeois view of the state, Lassalle insists that, “something must be added to this in a morally ordered community”; that is: “Solidarity of interests, community and reciprocity in development” (Lassalle in Fried and Sanders, pp 386-387).

The state for Lassalle thus arises as the vehicle of collective organisation which makes it possible for the associated individuals to achieve otherwise unreachable levels of “education, power and freedom” in the struggle for positive liberty as against the limitations imposed by nature (Lassalle in Fried and Sanders, p 387).

Later, Lassalle was to develop his vision for the state more fully, when he wrote of the bottom “96 ¼ per cent” of the German population:

To them, gentlemen, to the suffering classes does the State belong, not to us, the upper classes, for of them it is composed! What is the State? ... Yours, the poorer classes’ great association – that is the state. (Bernstein, n.d., pp 151-152)

Furthermore and most crucially, it was through equal, universal and direct suffrage that Lassalle supposed the state could be compelled to take on this role (Bernstein, n.d., pp 151-152). Hence, the working class is destined to become the “ruling class” and “is called upon the principle of its class as the principle of the generation in which
it lives, to make its Idea the dominant Idea of the entire society and in turn to reconstruct society in its own image” (Lassalle, p 84).

Crucially for our evaluation of Lassalle, while he was an idealist and believed in the power of the political, he also observed the importance of class interest in providing the basis and driving force for any revolution. He understood well that revolution would not occur without a social basis, indeed a class basis, driving it and providing its precondition. Lassalle argued that in contrast to the French revolutions in 1789 and 1830, the Prussian bourgeoisie had been compromised by the granting of social – i.e., economic – rights from above by the absolutist Prussian monarchy.

Hence for Lassalle:

In part at least, they introduced the social phase of the Revolution of 1789 long ago, and a merely political liberty will not arouse the enthusiasm of the bourgeoisie. (Lassalle, p 67)

By Lassalle’s reckoning, then, the bourgeoisie was concerned mainly with “its trade and its habits, its industry and production” and, therefore:

would much rather dispense with political freedom than jeopardise the public peace, and thereby its material interests, by resorting to a serious struggle for freedom.’

And because of this Lassalle asserted that,

a merely political freedom can now no longer be successfully achieved, because no material interest, because no class interest, stands behind this demand. (Lassalle, pp 64-67)

The Prospects of Revolution, and the Sources of Real Power

In order to understand the nature and premises of the Lassallean Third Way it is important to note the similarities of Lassalle’s position in comparison with Marx, as well as their differences. This has consequences for the tension between reform and revolution. While some questioned Lassalle’s revolutionary credentials on account of his position on the state and his dealings with Bismarck, Lassalle’s specific desire to radically transform the state marked him out as a revolutionary. Again: The premises of Lassalle’s agenda were that the existing state represented particular (absolutist and bourgeois) interests; and that a political revolution was necessary to transform the state apparatus into a vehicle for the universal interest. This would take the form of universal suffrage; backed by reform of the state apparatus of force itself.

From a speech in Berlin, 6 April 1867, Lassalle also expounded his view on the nature of political power and of constitutions. He distinguished between mere written
constitutions as opposed to “the true constitution, the real alignment of forces that obtains in the country”. Noting the power of the absolutist state, of its powers of violence and coercion, and crucially, its organisation and hence its capacity “to take up the struggle” whenever it was demanded of it, Lassalle saw the unreformed state as an instrument of oppression. Hence: “Constitutional questions are not fundamentally questions of right, but questions of might’ (Lassalle, p 32, p 40).

This absolutist state and specifically, the Prussian state could afford to buy time by granting relatively liberal constitutional concessions on paper and withdraw these reforms from under the people once the balance of forces had shifted. However, Lassalle also believed that were the people to organise, they would form the superior power. Lassalle’s solution was the direct election of officers from the rank and file soldiers themselves, so that they are not “hostile to the people”; a “blind instrument of monarchical power” (Lassalle, pp 33-35).

Elsewhere Lassalle identified pseudo-constitutionalism as nothing but a ploy to prolong absolutist power; where the participation and compromise of liberal elements with regard the diet (i.e., the parliament) was a betrayal; a source of demobilisation, and a sure path to defeat. Participation, Lassalle insisted, simply enabled the government to “maintain an appearance of respectability, as if [the written] constitution still applied” (Lassalle, pp 44-53). (Though imaginably we can conceive of a parliament under such circumstances acting as a pole of legitimacy in an attempt to win the loyalty of the apparatus of legitimate force under circumstances of dual power. These were not the circumstances in Lassalle’s Prussia.)

Lassalle’s scepticism with regard to limited constitutional reform needs to be considered in light of Eley’s observations. That is, that limited constitutional reform in the 1860s provided the conditions assisting the rise of mass social-democratic parties (Eley, pp 5-6, pp 33-34, 39).

Lassalle’s response to the failure of the 1848 revolutions – the victory of real state power over a merely written constitution – was his argument to alter “the real, actual relation of forces within the country”, “to intervene in the executive arm, and to intervene so thoroughly and remodel it so completely as to make it impossible for it to ever again effectively to oppose the will of the nation” (Lassalle, p 36 ) Apparently Lassalle underestimated the problems concerned with arming the people, as well as the superior training and discipline of the standing armed forces, and if the standing armed forces remained loyal to the absolutist monarchy, perhaps intervention at the level of the executive might not succeed either.

**Bernstein’s Response to Lassalle**
Bernstein remained unimpressed by Lassalle’s theoretical schema and developed a line of criticism in his important work, *Ferdinand Lassalle as a Social Reformer*. At this point, writing in 1891, around the time of the Erfurt Programme, Bernstein still represents the perspective of Marxist orthodoxy. In this book, Bernstein is seeking to relegate the Lassallean position to the relative margins; for Marxism to be seen as the hegemonic left discourse – the Second Way.

To begin, in Chapter Five of that book Bernstein criticises Lassalle’s notion of a “working-class estate” (Arbeiterstand). Hence:

[Lassalle derives] the concept of the bourgeois not from the actual power which the possession of capital confers, and which is due solely to its economic effects and forces, but from the juridical and political privileges which the bourgeois enjoys or claims on the strength of his property. (Bernstein, n.d., pp 124-125)

Bernstein’s answer to Lassalle is a classical Marxist response privileging the economic as the base upon which the attendant cultural and political superstructure is dependent. It may be said, however, that the Prussian bourgeoisie did hold a degree of political power in Lassalle’s time – political power crystallized through the three-class electoral system. Bernstein’s point, it appears, is that this power arose only as a consequence of concessions from the old feudal classes in response to the rising preponderance of the bourgeoisie and bourgeois wealth. However, while political and economic power complemented and helped consolidate each other, that is not to say that political power was thoroughly reducible to and dependent upon the economic foundation. Hence the danger within such currents in Marxism, of reverting to economism. Indeed in the constitutional struggle that was to follow it was Bismarck who defied the liberal bourgeoisie, ultimately co-opting them to the political designs of the royalist state, such that the parliament became a rubber stamp in return for the defence of bourgeois economic interests.

Bernstein was also unimpressed with Lassalle’s reverence for the state. Instead Bernstein supposes that the modern state raises the prospect of “state slavery”, and regardless of Lassalle’s “democratic and socialist views” any “cult of the State”, and, indeed, “all theory built upon preconceived concepts” can degenerate into the glorification of “existing, or of past institutions” (Bernstein, n.d., pp 128-129). Thus Bernstein alleges that Lassalle derived from Hegel “a semi-mystical reverence for the state at a time when, above all, it behoved [the workers] to shake off the police State” (Bernstein, n.d., pp 148-149).

The subsequent history has shown the potential for state apparatus based both on the principle of repression and/or the defence of rights and liberties, and also on the principle of the helping hand. While Lassalle’s language of unifying all society into a single “ethical whole” perhaps leans too far towards extreme collectivism; movements
for liberation need to start by assuming both individual and collective rights and needs.

Potentially, Lassalle’s envisaged state would be too extensive: all-pervasive. By this I mean that there need to be checks and balances in order to preserve freedoms; and Lassalle’s envisaged state would perhaps be too strong as against civil society. Yet, the most advanced welfare states have achieved a greater balance between the realms of state and civil society – and even in the context of deeply embedded corporatism – while nonetheless providing the social assistance and enabling liberty envisaged both by Lassalle and subsequent Social Democrats. It is unhelpful, therefore, to conceive only of two extremes when it comes to the state.

**Lassalle’s further Theoretical Achievements**

Bernstein observes that Lassalle was indebted to Marx for a great part of his critique of capitalism. Yet one of Lassalle’s most marked departures from the assumptions and goals of Marx was in his scheme for producers co-operative associations supported with state aid (Bernstein, n.d., pp 8, 11-12, 22-23). There were potential complications with the co-operativist approach. Lassalle was later to argue in what Bernstein calls the time of his socialist agitation that strategies of “self-help” were an exercise in “futility”. This was so, he supposed, on the basis of an “iron law of wages”:

*[The] iron and inexorable law, according to which, under the domination of supply and demand, the average wages of labour remain always reduced to the bare subsistence which, according to the standard of living of a nation, is necessary for the maintenance of life and the reproduction of the species.* (Bernstein, n.d., p 150)

As Bernstein further elaborates on Lassalle’s theory:

If wages periodically rose above this average, the greater number of marriages and births caused an increase of the working-class population, and with it, the supply of labour, in consequence of which, wages again sank to their former level. If they fell below this level, emigration, greater mortality among the workers, abstinence from marriage, and fewer births, caused a diminution in the supply of labour, in consequence of which wages again went up. (Bernstein, n.d., p 150)

Marx had thought Lassalle’s position was “gross-oversimplification”, instead seeing “boom and slump, the state of world markets, technical progress, the proletarianisation of the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie, and finally the effect of working-class pressure on wages” – all of which “might collectively press wages up
or down”. Notably, Lassalle conceded that “the minimum” wages necessary “is not merely a physiological but also a social and cultural one’ (Kolakowski, p 197-198).

Nevertheless, furthering Bernstein’s critique: Isolated co-operatives may provide temporary advantages but once applied generally, “the workers would, as producers, again lose in wages what, as consumers, they had gained in the purchase of their goods”. However, as Bernstein notes, in Lassalle’s position: “the condition of the working-class could only be permanently freed from the pressure of this economic law, if the wages of labour were replaced by the possession of the products of [labour]”; that is, “if the working class became its own employer”. But this extension of the co-operative principle was only possible (Bernstein) “on a vast scale”, if “the means to do this – the necessary capital, i.e., the necessary credit – [is] provided by the State” (Bernstein, n.d., pp 150-151).

Toni Offermann makes the additional observation that as a consequence, Lassalle’s theory, if true, would mean inflexible limits upon the gains achievable by purely trade-union activity (Offermann in Barclay and Weitz, p 88). However, Bernstein responds that Lassalle’s “iron law of wages” had “been outlived in the society of modern industry, with its increased faculties of communication, its accelerated cycle of crises, stagnation and prosperity, its rapid advance in the productivity of labour etc”. In any case:

[Lassalle’s] theory presupposes an absolutely free movement of supply and demand on the labour market. [This] free movement is at once interfered with as soon as the working class, as an organised body, faces the employers, or as soon as the state, by its legislation, interferes with the regulation of the conditions of labour. (Bernstein, n.d., p 161)

The other conundrums identified by Bernstein in response to Lassalle are very similar to those faced by socialist writers today. Co-operatives, Bernstein thinks, would compete against each other; and “differences of interest would arise”. Every association would try and “force up profits” at the expense of each other and of “other categories of labour” (Bernstein, n.d., p 163).

Bernstein further concludes that Lassalle’s proposed “national insurance associations” would break up because of overproduction, and Lassalle’s associations would be subject to the usual capitalist laws of competition and, therefore, they would be subject to risk. Thus, and following Marx”s own analysis, Bernstein supposes real workers’ control is only “possible in proportion as competition is done away with … is only attainable by means of monopoly”. Yet, here there is also a dilemma, with Bernstein observing the protections against “fraud” provided through competition. Today we could add to these observations that competition drives innovation, product-quality, and efficient resource allocation. In conclusion Bernstein states: “Transplanted into the midst of our capitalist society … co-operation must, in one
way or another, always assume a capitalistic character” (Bernstein, n.d., pp 164-165; Kolakowski, pp 198-199).

Meanwhile, Kolakowski relates Marx’s position that full recompense for workers in the context of producer’s co-operatives could not work because “part of that value must be devoted to public needs, necessary unproductive work, reserves, etc.” (Kolakowski, pp 198-199).

Lassalle had anticipated such criticisms, and his plans for co-operatives in a competitive context were merely provisional. Thus, responding to such criticism in a letter to Rodbertus: :

   My product of labour would be the share in the common socialised production, which is determined by the relations in which my quantum of labour stands to the quantum of labour of the whole of Society. (Lassalle in Bernstein, n.d., p 169)

To this end Lassalle anticipates a land tax that would “supply the State with [the] means for defraying the costs of education, science, art and public expenditure of all kinds” (Bernstein, n.d., p 170). Ultimately, Lassalle envisaged, “equalisation” would be brought about in every “branch of trade” by combination in “one great association, abandoning all private middle man business” with “salerooms provided by the State” (Bernstein, n.d., p 170). This, in turn, would neutralise overproduction and cyclical crises.

For Bernstein this is, in fact, “the Communist idea, which takes the total social product of labour, and not the product of labour of an individual or a group” (Bernstein, n.d., p 169). However, Bernstein also alleges that Lassalle held back on revealing his final intent for fear that the existing political and social forces were not ready.

In some ways, then, Lassalle was ahead of his time, and in some ways he repeated the errors that were to trouble the Left long after his passing. His idea of a land tax was suggestive of later social-democratic strategies to iron out the inequalities of the labour market through social wage provision. Yet, the idea of monopolistic great associations in every national branch of industry was problematic. For instance, the removal of competition and market signals which drive resource allocation, quality and innovation. Even co-operative monopoly could lead to the abuse of market power, although such great associations competing in a global market context may, indeed, remain subject to such corrective competitive forces. So, in fact, Lassalle’s provisional solution seems more attractive on several points.
Responding to Oppositional Themes

Assessed on the basis of a selection of oppositional themes it is interesting to consider the multi-faceted nature of Lassalle’s project. In the larger picture, Lassalleanism looms as a Third Way by providing a distinctive revolutionary discourse in contrast with Marxism.

Lassalle envisages greater freedom, for what he calls the “fourth estate” as being key to the freedom of all humanity. Defining the struggle as such, he privileges the political over economic class as addressed by Marx. Lassalle seeks a future beyond the domination of one class over another, and yet, his means was one of personal dictatorship over the organisation that was to herald this change (the General German Worker’s Association). Thus, Lassalle seeks the personal freedom of all individuals from the hardships imposed by nature, but suggests an authoritarian collectivism as the means of achieving this. While the members of his association maintain a collectivist discipline, Lassalle himself, as leader, maintains his personal initiative.

Social movements arguably require a deal of discipline in order to succeed. Swedish social democracy was to succeed in delivering much in the way of social and industrial rights, on the basis of disciplined corporatist structures and channels of negotiation. Even considering this scenario, looking back, the idea of endowing all authority in one person seems extreme, and discipline taken too far crushes authentic initiative and corrective self-criticism from below.

In his theoretical approach, Lassalle was a devoted Hegelian and, so, both a determinist and an idealist. The evolving Idea by this reckoning was guided by a kind of providence where everything was purposeful in the plan of the universe. Guided by this kind of mentality, for Lassalle socialism was an idea whose time had come. On the other hand, his limited success was suggestive of an early over-optimism.

Later, it was Marxists such as Kautsky who urged on the basis of historical materialism – as opposed to idealism – the need for patience through the drawn-out process of maturing economic conditions. The irony here is that Lassalle’s personal influence suggests a potential individual influence beyond that entertained by either Hegelian or Marxist determinism (Though this is not an endorsement of that narrow notion of history as predominately the work of great men). Still, arguably, Lassalle’s personal influence upon Bismarck impacted upon the Iron Chancellor’s decision to implement a kind of “practical Christianity” emphasizing a welfare state that was extensive for its time. Hence, the question of voluntarism and determinism arises once more.

As to the matter of liberty, Lassalle’s conception is one of liberation from want; to elevation of all to a point of cultural participation and the improvement of humanity’s
material lot through the domination of nature; through the development of “morality, culture and science” (Lassalle in Fried and Sanders, p 385), but in The Workers’ Programme, at least, Lassalle seems ambiguous about political and civic liberty. Certainly, Lassalle’s was a statist socialism, and while I do not want to stigmatise the potentially progressive role for the state, at the same time a state that is absolute and does not have ‘checks and balances’ in the realm of civil society is potentially open to abuse; by the same rationale, the dominance of monopoly capital in alliance with the state power is also abused.

Indeed, today Lassalle would be accused of a unpalatable pragmatism in his dealings with authority and in his inclination to outflank the liberal bourgeoisie through alliance with the forces of absolutism. As such, the liberal bourgeoisie was largely excluded from Lassalle’s movement as a matter of political strategy. Arguably Lassalle was willing, to some extent, to sacrifice political liberalism for the sake of expedience in forging an alliance with the forces of Prussian absolutism (though, importantly, it was the bourgeois progressivists who themselves had rejected a programme endorsing universal suffrage). In Lassalle’s schema the liberal bourgeoisie did not first lead a liberal bourgeois revolution in Prussia; rather, their exploitation of the workers and denial of proletarian political rights gave rise to the social forces that would coalesce to usher in a specific kind of socialism based on an alliance between the workers and the German Crown. Therefore, there was to be a class struggle between workers and the bourgeoisie; however, conciliation between workers and the Prussian monarchy was to skip over the liberal revolution. While many have identified a crucial synergy between liberalism and socialism, Lassalle’s position was perhaps ambiguous with regard political liberalism.

Quite possibly Lassalle took this route as a wider agenda; one of overcoming Roman Catholic and absolutist Austria-Hungary. Arguably, he saw Prussian leadership of Germany as a counter-balance against Austrian power. Certainly, though, Marx, and later Bernstein found Lassalle’s appeal to the likes of Bismarck hard to stomach, and almost of a betrayal of history by denying the liberal bourgeoisie its historic mission, a mission whose realisation was seen by them as a necessary precondition for socialism.

However, by promoting the first serious working-class organisation in Germany – the kernel of the future German Social Democratic Party – Lassalle promoted working-class solidarity in a real, practical and historically important way. His was a vision both of conflict between classes and of conflict between nations. In a conspiratorial fashion he sought alliance with the likes of Garibaldi, and sought to play one great power off against the other, with the long-term aim of undermining what he saw as the most reactionary powers. This conspiratorial element stands in contrast with Marx’s emphasis on open political and industrial organisation.
Yet, at home such manoeuvrings dovetailed with his personal appeals to Bismarck to undermine the liberal bourgeoisie in return for free and equal universal suffrage and state aid for workers’ co-operatives. The General German Workers’ Association was to act as his personal instrument – the solidarity of its members providing the electoral and social base with which to overwhelm the liberal bourgeoisie – to deliver the goods to Bismarck. Yet, precisely in its comprising the kernel of future social democracy, Lassalle’s work was to have greater consequences than the disillusioned agitator and conspirator supposed in his final months. However, the idea of a nationalist socialism – as associated with Lassalle – also was to be perverted in the coming decades, first to legitimise a German ethno-nationalism and participation in the Great War, and more diabolically, with twentieth-century German fascism.

Importantly, though, it should be emphasized Lassalle over the long term was nonetheless entertaining “the Communist idea, which takes the total social product of labour, and not the product of labour of an individual or a group” (Bernstein, n.d., p 169). Monarchist-corporatism was not Lassalle’s envisaged final destination; nor was the fascism so fundamentally destructive of personal liberty.

Regarding nationalism and internationalism, again there is Bernstein’s characterisation of German sentiment regarding Lassalle, and the pointed, rhetorical question: ‘Was he not a national patriot, in contrast to the unpatriotic nationalists, destitute of “fatherland”? ’ (Bernstein, n.d., pp 7-8). However, arguably, despite his avowed German nationalism, for Lassalle Germany was instrumental as part of a deeper and broader internationalist outlook. Hence, observing the tension between nationalism and internationalism it is unfair simply to view Lassalle as being of the nationalist mould. Just as Lassalle saw Prussia as instrumental in the eclipse of Austria-Hungary, even under the leadership of Louis Napoleon III, arguably, France could be regarded once again as the potential vehicle for displacing the crowned heads of Europe. For Lassalle nationalism was simply instrumental in the pursuit of an internationalist vision to change Europe, and to change the world.

To conclude on comparing Marx with Lassalle: Lassalleanism and Marxism contest themes in tension in different ways. Both are effectively determinist in their theoretical outlook – Marx in a materialist manner and Lassalle in the mould of political Hegelian idealism. Both are open to the possible need for politically authoritarian strategies and, yet, look forward to a future of freedom (though it should be noted that Marx, Engels, Kautsky all considered the possibility of peaceful transition as well). Lassalle is open to intrigues and class collaboration behind the scenes to achieve his aims, while for Marx and his later adherents, the class struggle must be pressed continually, openly and with little compromise.

For Lassalle, the dialectic takes place in the political and the ideal domain in a fashion not dependent in the last instance upon the economic. Indeed, the political state is
seen as the key to freedom, an idea of freedom understood as positive freedom from want through the collective domination of nature.

**Conclusion: Lassalle’s Legacy**

Lassalle left both a practical and organisational legacy as well as a theoretical legacy. For a brief period in the early 1860s, Ferdinand Lassalle emerged as a pivotal advocate of the socialist cause in Germany. At a practical level, he was responsible for the formation of the General German Workers’ Association – the first German working-class political party, which flourished even after his death, and ultimately, formed a key component of the future German Social Democratic Party (SPD). The specifically-Lassallean movement within the SPD only declined decades later after the SPD’s Erfurt Programme and the posthumous release of Marx’s ‘Critique of the Gotha Programme’. Lassalle and those who followed him also did much to put universal suffrage on the agenda in Prussia and later Germany. On the other hand, Lassalle introduced the potentially volatile mixture of socialism and German nationalism.

As for Lassalle’s theoretical legacy, he formulated a theoretical framework quite distinct from that of Marx. His was a political and idealist Hegelian perspective, which supposed that the socialist idea’s time had come. Unlike Marx, Lassalle rejected materialism. Lassalle envisaged the realm of the political dominating the economy, and not the other way around – as presented in the orthodox Marxist schema of base determining superstructure. However, again, given Lassalle’s Hegelian framework, the young radical was a determinist rather than a radical voluntarist. This theoretical framework was among Lassalle’s legacies, and it can be viewed as a predecessor to later political socialisms.

The tension between Lassalle’s political socialism and Marx’s historical materialist socialism was to be resolved for a time with the rise of Marxism to a position of theoretical hegemony on the radical Left. Marxism saw off the challenge both from the Lassalleans, and from the neo-Kantians. In the decades that follow, however, new challenges emerge in German social democracy in particular. There is the revisionist controversy around Eduard Bernstein, for whom key Marxist tenets are questionable, but there also arises a style of social-democratic pragmatism within which uncritical nationalism becomes a condition for the collapse of internationalist solidarity in the face of the First World War.
Chapter Three:

Eduard Bernstein—‘Father of Revisionism’

It is necessary to consider the revisionist controversy thoroughly if we are to meaningfully explore the question of progressive Third Roads and Third Ways during the period 1848-1934. The discussion spans two chapters: here, on the contributions of Eduard Bernstein, and the other on the contributions of Rosa Luxemburg in Chapter Four. Many accounts of Bernstein downplay his preservation of so much from Marx, while critiques of Luxemburg tend to vulgarise her account of spontaneity. Both discussions are concerned with correctives: Karl Kautsky’s interpretation of Marxism was the dominant revolutionary discourse from 1880 to 1906, and Bernstein in his revisionist theory breaks with Marx and Kautsky at a range of levels. The views of Kautsky will be treated separately, in Chapter Five.

This chapter first provides historical and biographical background for the period in question and for Bernstein. Thereafter, the chapter accounts for how and why Bernstein’s contribution may be thought of as a socialist Third Way. In this context we will consider the nature and content of the Bernsteinian revisionist Third Way as compared with the First Way of capitalism and the Second Way that was orthodox Marxism in the 1880-1906 period. Following this is detailed analysis of Bernstein’s canonical work, Evolutionary Socialism. Important themes are elaborated here, including an analysis of conflicting interpretations of scientific socialism or historical materialism, and Bernstein’s sceptical empiricism and eclecticism as distinct from the orthodoxies of dialectical materialism.

In brief, Bernstein questions the interpretation of scientific socialism founded on an all-encompassing theorization of totality. More specifically, he rejects Marx’s dialectical materialism, suggesting in its place a somewhat-competing definition of historical materialism. Usually dialectical materialism and historical materialism are taken as synonymous. Bernstein has his own vision of material circumstance driving history, and with no dialectical framework.

The rejection of the dialectical schema has other consequences. Necessity – namely, socialism necessarily developing as the consequence of capitalist contradictions – is down played in exchange for contingency. Sceptical empiricism, involving a focus on that which can be verified via the senses, takes the place of, as Bernstein sees it,
(unverifiable) dialectical speculation. Bernstein’s approach also involves a practical eclecticism in place of notions of totality that are said to be grasped by an overarching dialectical materialist approach.

Accompanying his interpretation of historical materialism, Bernstein maintains a sense of teleology; he sees history leading forward with the gradual, perhaps unstoppable progress of socialist evolution/reform. Without the dialectic this sense of necessary progress is harder to justify, though, and certainly it was entirely unacceptable to Kautsky, for whom there were no guarantees outside the orthodoxy.

Also important for this tension between orthodoxy and revisionism, Bernstein rejected a seeming tendency towards economism in Marxism, that is, reducing everything to determination by the economic base. Instead, there is a supposition of greater potential autonomy for the political sphere.

This chapter also concerns the theme of Marxist economic orthodoxy the tensions that arose between it and (specifically ‘Bernsteinian’) revisionist economics. Within this frame are a number of sub-themes. Marx’s labour theory of value is interrogated by Bernstein with the incorporation of elements of subjectivism. Assumptions of class bifurcation and working-class immiseration are questioned, and in favour of the assumption of intermediary classes and steady material gains for the working-class. The assumption of ultimate capitalist collapse is opposed to the alternative assumption of capitalist adaptability and resilience. Important here is Bernstein’s emphasis on consumer co-operatives as distinct from producers’ co-operatives.

Bernstein raised the prospect of qualitative social change without revolution. This, it seems, was interpreted by Bernstein also as comprising a qualitative shift in the social and economic order – but through violent, illegal and ruptural means. Hence, there is the theme of reform/revolution, and the very closely connected theme of liberalism/socialism – with Bernstein posing a distinctive reconciliation or synthesis between them.

Finally, the chapter concludes with a consideration of Bernstein’s formidable legacy, and the content of his revisionism – the components of his thought that retain force to this day; those which have been disproven; and those that are open to constructive criticism. Bernstein’s multitude of theoretical insights comprises his greatest legacy, a this is testament both to socialism and to freedom; and to the fruitful union of liberalism and socialism, as distinct from their uncompromising opposition to each other.

**Bernstein’s Life and Times**
Eduard Bernstein was born in 1850 to Jewish parents, not long after the momentous European revolutionary upheavals of 1848. He grew up during the period when Lassalle was expounding his socialist philosophy. Adopting a more radically revolutionary outlook, like Kautsky he became involved with the Eisenacher movement (the Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei Eisenacher Programm). Peter Gay observes that despite their divisions on issues like the Franco-Prussian War the Lassalleans and Eisenachers found common cause, uniting into a single party at the 1875 Gotha Conference (Gay, pp 19-34). Bismarck had co-opted or otherwise crushed the liberal bourgeoisie. According to Gay he had erased “all traces of liberalism from the army”, and “for these reasons thoughtful socialists were anxious that the two radical parties should establish a common front before the government took even more repressive measures” (Gay, pp 28-37).

In any case, the compromise programme agreed to at the 1875 Conference mixed the principles of the Eisenachers and the Lassalleans somewhat eclectically, calling (in a Lassallean vein) for the establishment, “with all legal means”, of a “free state and of the socialist society”, “breaking … the iron law of wages through the abolition of the wage system”, and the end of “exploitation in all forms”; with “the removal of all social and political inequalities” (Gay, p 37); but Gay also observes that:

The specific demands were taken largely from the Eisenach programme of 1869: universal, equal, direct suffrage, abolition of all combination and press laws, general and equal public education, a progressive income tax, a normal working day, abolition of child labour, and the ubiquitous producers’ co-operatives’. (Gay, p 37)

In May of the same year, 1875, a unity conference was again called for Gotha, and a united Sozialistische Arbeiter-Partei Deutschlands emerged.

In 1878, however, Bismarck used two attempts on the life of Emperor William I as a pretext to ban socialist agitation, and: “Socialist meetings and congresses were outlawed, newspapers confiscated, members arrested”. The anti-socialist bill became law on 19 October 1878, remaining in force for twelve years (Gay, pp 40-41). Thereafter, Bernstein and other socialists were driven into exile in Zurich, Switzerland.

At around this time in Germany a range of social legislation was passed, including a sickness insurance act (1883), accident insurance acts (1884 and 1885) and an old-age insurance act (1889). As Gay has it, Bismarck “was going to weaken the working class by doing for the proletariat what he would not permit it to do for itself” (Gay, p 52). Many socialists who remained in Germany found themselves co-opted to nationalism and the designs of the existing state for the sake of practical social reform that ameliorated the lot of the working class. The very nature of the Social
Democratic Party was changing, a fateful trend that later to contribute to a collapse of international working-class solidarity in the face of World War I.

Even when Bismarck’s anti-socialist laws lapsed in 1888, Bernstein was forced for a time to remain in London in exile for fear of indictment for sedition (Gay, p 60). Manfred Steger contends that Bernstein’s experience of Britain left an indelible impression upon him such that ‘his political outlook became increasingly “British”’; including “admiration for England’s basic liberties, its parliamentarianism, and its inclination towards piecemeal social reformism”. Bernstein’s time in exile in Britain also had him exposed to that nation’s own liberal-left traditions (Steger, pp 66-68).

Steger further contends that it was “Bernstein’s twelve years of British exile [that] helped him to perceive the possible theoretical compatibility of a left-liberalism and (Marxist) socialist conceptions” (Steger, p 69). Even when in exile Bernstein was called on to develop the tactical substance of the Erfurt Programme of 1891. Erfurt eliminated much of the previous Lassallean content from the Gotha Programme. Bernstein specifically developed a policy orientation that included equal suffrage in Prussia, a graduated income tax, the eight-hour day and the right to free burial. Now – in the 1890s – Bernstein “developed his theory of Revisionism in detail” (Gay, p 63; pp 66-68; Bronner p 585).

The revisionist controversy did not spell the end of Bernstein’s political career. Bernstein agitated strongly for a separate peace throughout most of the Great War period. Before the War, he had advocated a Western liberal entente, including Germany, France and Britain, to exert diplomatic pressure for reform within the more conservative regimes such as Russia, the Ottoman Empire and Austria-Hungary; it was also to provide a framework for mutual disarmament (Morgan, pp 526-527; Fletcher, 1983a, pp 85-88).

With the onset of the War in 1914, the possibility of a general collapse loomed. As Fletcher explains, for Marxists such as Luxemburg war was a systemic imperative of imperialist capitalism. However, Bernstein believed open (and democratic) diplomacy could prevent war; or once war had begun, provide the basis of a separate peace (Fletcher, 1983b, p 577; Fletcher, 1983a, pp 81-82).

Fletcher also observes that Bernstein developed an ethical and political commitment to free trade, based not only on the assumption of greater efficiency and prosperity but also so that cultural exchange, freer trade and mutual dependence could secure peace. Yet, Bernstein’s interest in free trade and pacifism was admittedly not shared by most German revisionists, and the leaders of imperial Germany arguably saw co-dependence as a threat to their own security (Fletcher 1983b, pp 562-564, pp 568-569, pp 576-577).
Overall, the basic building blocks of Bernstein’s world view are manifold. It would be a neat formulation to oppose Bernstein’s liberal socialism to the scientific socialism of Marx and Engels. The reality is more complex, however. First, Bernstein maintained his own idea of a scientific socialism, and it could be conceived as a historical, but not dialectical materialism. The influence of the means of production and of their development were to be considered in depth alongside other influences. Yet, this was a materialism that accepted a relative autonomy of politics and culture, but which impacted upon one another.

Further, Bernstein maintained an element of teleology, of history progressing towards a better and more just social order. At the same time, he seems to propose an outlook that recognises contingency – a more open sense of history and its possibilities, as distinct from a Marxian dialectic, which saw both the breakdown of capitalism and the dawning of socialism as inevitable. Finally, Bernstein returns to a Kantian (sceptical) epistemology, as well as the pursuit of ethics and ideals as essential to why we struggle.

**Bernstein’s Revisionism as a Relative Third Way**

Eduard Bernstein clearly qualifies as one of the first protagonists of a socialist Third Way, arguing in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for a reformist and evolutionary socialism that reconciled socialism and liberalism. The characterisation of Bernstein’s position as a Third Way can be established in the contrasting ways it stands in relation to those opportunist currents of social democracy thoroughly co-opted to the First Way of hegemonic capitalist ideology. Bernstein remained true to his convictions, opposing not only militarism, but also envisaging an evolutionary path to qualitative change.

Bernstein suggested socialist goals of a more open conception, assuming those goals to be in a state of constant evolution, shifting in relation to economic and to cultural circumstances. Thus he was uncomfortable with the idea of a final goal. This further reinforces the conceptualization of Bernstein’s position as a socialist Third Way as opposed to a socialist Third Road. Samuel Bernstein (a different individual) wrote of Eduard Bernstein that the rejection of any final aim would leave nothing but “the chops and changes of petty politics”. Arguably there is some truth in this; even more so as relates to contemporary self-proclaimed social democracy and its typical pragmatism. Though with his ethical compassion and insistence on some march of progress, Eduard Bernstein’s was resistant to the worst extremes of political opportunism (S. Bernstein, 1940, pp 131-132).

Bernstein’s preference for reform over revolution pitted him against the Marxist orthodoxy of his time: He was opposed both to the Marxist orthodoxy and to the capitalist framework. Post-Marxist scholars Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau have
made the crucial assertion that it is mistaken to sweepingly identify “reformism with revisionism”, and that “what is essential in a reformist practice is political quietism and the corporatist confinement of the working class”. Their suggestion is that Bernstein can be interpreted in a revisionist/revolutionary manner. And that this puts him at odds with modern ‘reformism without reforms’ and its focus on the short term, and on state power as the end in and of itself.

Yet, Mouffe and Laclau also contend that Bernstein’s progressive teleology, or “a law of progress” assuming an ongoing accumulation of “democratic advances” (including working-class organisation) can encourage such a “quietism” in the face of “corporative confinement.” They do not conflate the two but suggest “a coincidence between theoretical revisionism and practical reformism” where “the broadening of political initiative to a number of democratic fronts never comes in to contradiction with the quietism and corporatism of the working class. Therefore, as Mouffe and Laclau argue, “if every advance is irreversible … its consolidation no longer depends upon an unstable articulation of forces and ceases to be a political problem” (Mouffe and Laclau, pp 29-35).

Although much later in Sweden, for instance, apparent corporatist arrangements were seen by some writers such as Korpi as a “democratic class struggle”. (Korpi, 1983, pp 21-25) Bernstein is without doubt the best known of the socialist revisionists. Though claiming to revise Marx rather than replace him, Bernstein abandoned core pillars of the Marxist doctrine, such that his ultimate status as a Marxist was called into question. Bernstein was hailed by many as the “father of revisionism”, and was to oppose revolution – taken to infer some kind of political rupture, probably in the form of an illegal, violent and insurrectionary seizure of power – as compared to the competing interpretation of qualitative change regardless of means.

Bernstein came to argue that capitalism was becoming both more resilient and more flexible. He envisaged credit, cartels and trusts as comprising vehicles for the expansion of the world market, and with greater responsiveness to crises. He further rejected Marxist assumptions of class bifurcation and immiseration as well as the presumption that monopolisation would be taken to the utmost extreme (Steger, pp 79-82; Joll, pp 60-61).

Eduard Bernstein’s contribution to the socialist tradition and the broader Left in his work Evolutionary Socialism was crucial in providing a theoretical framework for democratic socialist reformism, and in so doing, advancing an agenda that was at once distinct from thoroughly opportunist social democracy, and from orthodox Marxism – which insisted that substantial change was difficult if not impossible within the framework of capitalist pressures and capitalist contradictions. For Luxemburg and Kautsky, in contrast, it was those contradictions that made socialism inevitable and necessary. Here we have the opposition between orthodox Marxist necessity in the context of the materialist dialectic, and Bernstein’s contingency (and yet with the
teleological assumption of progress; cumulative reforms building upon one another such that, in time, essentially capitalism is reformed out of existence). Bernstein’s perspective threatened the Marxist economic worldview of a necessary dialectical movement of contradictions with a different perspective that assumed capitalist flexibility and adaptability.

**Competing Interpretations of Historical Materialism**

This section concerns the ways in which Bernstein negotiated a historical materialist – and thereby according to his own reasoning, scientific – outlook, apparently in harmony with a liberal socialism grounded in values and practical-minded eclecticism. There is the opposition here between Bernstein’s empirical scientific socialism and the orthodox Marxist scientific socialism constructed on the basis of both historical materialism and dialectics as applied to an evolving mode of production.

Also arising in this context is the opposition between the theme of a hard philosophical materialism and a practical and sociological materialism advanced by Bernstein (and arguably by Marx, in contradistinction with Kautsky). Political scientist Sheri Berman, in her work, *The Primacy of Politics* argues that Bernstein attacked historical materialism and class struggle (Berman, pp 14-15). This claim is further underscored by Berman’s insistence that at around 1900 socialists posed the question:

> Would socialism be the result of inevitable economic development and class struggle, or would it be the consequence of democratic, political action and cross-class co-operation? (Berman, pp 47-48)

However, this presents a false dichotomy between democratic political action versus class struggle. Berman’s understanding of Bernstein’s position is debatable; arguably, Bernstein simply wished to transpose the class struggle to the level of the parliament while maintaining a role for active unions in the struggle for an erosion in the rate of exploitation and the absolutism of capital. Bernstein also foresaw circumstances where defensive mass strike action could be necessary.

Bernstein himself writes in a manner suggestive of class struggle:

> This new vision [of the transition to socialism] takes place in the daily life of the working class. It shows the proletariat growing in numbers and in social power – not merely pushing forward, but upward as well, elevating its economic, ethical, and political standards. (Bernstein in Steger, 1996 p 7, 1996)
Also with Bernstein’s particular materialism, instead of insisting on hard (philosophical) determinism, the emphasis was on the central influence of material factors (Berman, pp 14-15).

To establish their distinctiveness, it is useful to consider Bernstein’s version of scientific socialism alongside the Marxian orthodoxy of the time. This is best taken in the context of an exposition of his underlying sociological and economic materialism, which in fact rejected absolute philosophical materialism. In denying the scientific character of the materialist dialectic – indeed, of all dialectical approaches embracing the totality of social relations or ideas – Bernstein was challenging one of the core pillars of Marxist orthodoxy. For Bernstein there existed in orthodox Marxism the fault of metaphysical speculation – the supposition of a total ensemble of social relations moving necessarily in a particular progressive and evolutionary motion, which was based on speculation and not upon a rigorous and sceptical empirical scientific method. For Bernstein the hypothesised dialectical process supposed by Marx was simply too broad and all-encompassing to be proven on an empirical basis.

Indeed, he rejected the reduction of history to a single abstract principle (including the class-struggle dialectic), and of change to a single, final redemptive struggle which would deliver humanity from oppression, exploitation and alienation. There could be no categorical denial of such a total ensemble as assumed by Marx and others attempting to grasp the movement of totality; but nor could such be proven conclusively (Bernstein, 1961, p 5, Kolakowski, pp 436-438, 448-443).

Yet, Bernstein believed very strongly that with his evolutionary socialism he was revising Marx “without dragging down the other parts [of the Marxian historical materialist method] in sympathy” (Bernstein, 1961, p 5). Bernstein preserves the sense of a socialist social science even beyond the Marxist dialectical materialist orthodoxy.

While he rejects the crude determinist position, Bernstein nonetheless echoes his mentor Engels in observing social and economic tendencies that manifest at a broader (societal) level – beyond the individual will. In Engels’s words there existed “an endless group of parallelograms of forces”; “thwarting one another”, where “what every single man wills is hindered by every other man, and the result of the struggle is something which no one had intended” (Engels in Bernstein, 1961, p 11). This lends further weight to arguments that a simple dialectic, based solely on economic evolution as a consequence of class struggle, is not sufficient to grasp totality.

Thrown into question here, for Bernstein as surely as Engels, is the supposition that the political/cultural superstructure is crudely and in a uni-directional way determined by the economic base. Culture and polity rest upon an economic base but can acquire relative autonomy, variously acting upon one another.
Thus, in a statement with critical ramifications for socialist ideology and the socialist movement, Bernstein allows for national/cultural specificity and prefigures those relatively autonomous cultural (ideological) forces, as well as: “Sciences, arts, a whole series of social relations”. (Bernstein, n.d., p 14) And some of these have thwarted socialism with their increasing strength, and with the decline of the objective social conditions which had once led to revolutionary and class consciousness on the part of the industrial working class. Even when these conditions were favourable Bernstein makes the very important observation that:

The purely economic forces create[d] … only a disposition for the reception of certain ideas, but how these then arise and spread and what form they take, depend on the co-operation of a whole series of influences. (Bernstein, 1961, pp 13-14)

Bernstein was to be charged with eclecticism, which stood against attempts to grasp the totality of social forces taken as an entire ensemble rather than as isolated phenomena. Bernstein responded:

Eclecticism … is often only the natural reaction from the doctrinaire desire to deduce everything from one thing and to treat everything according to one and the same method … It is the rebellion of sober reason against the tendency inherent in every doctrine to fetter thought. (Bernstein, 1961, pp 13-14)

### Teleology and Totality versus Contingency

Despite his critique of metaphysical speculation, Bernstein retained a belief that humanity was moving forward (and upward) to something better. Many years after abandoning the Hegelian/ Marxist dialectic his worldview remains one of progress, driven by evolution rather than violent rupture. Here we have the opposition between pre-given teleology and contingency.

Arguably, Bernstein negotiates these ideological themes in tension arriving at a perspective that presumes both a telos of progress and such contingency that there is room to choose different futures. By this reckoning, the socialist future is no longer rendered inevitable and necessary by fundamental capitalist contradictions at the level of the economic base. The co-existence, here, of teleology and contingency admittedly appears contradictory.

In the 1909 preface to the English edition of his 1889 work *Evolutionary Socialism*, Eduard Bernstein made a statement considered to be seminal in the history of democratic socialism:
Unable to believe in finalities at all, I cannot believe in a final aim of socialism. But I strongly believe in the socialist movement, in the march forward of the working classes … who step by step must work out their emancipation by changing society from the domain of the commercial land-holding oligarchy to a real democracy which in all its departments is guided by the interests of those who work and create. (Bernstein, n.d., 1909, p xxii)

So, again we find Bernstein’s teleological outlook, his sense that reforms were building constructively and cumulatively one upon another. Though such essential teleological assumptions are more widely questioned on the Left today, with the rescission of labour market regulation and industrial liberties that Bernstein held as standards of progress (Bernstein, 1961, pp xxv-xxvi).

It was this appreciation, of cumulative reforms, that Bernstein was to emphasize, as distinct from radical negation. Nonetheless, he was to retain a sense that class conflict animated this process, with the clear delineation of working-class interests from bourgeois interests. Oligarchy, and hence plutocracy, are contrasted with their opposite – democracy. The ideal of a classless future remains. The conquest of political power, by degrees, remains in the form of the pursuit of rights of citizenship (Bernstein, 1961, pp xxix-xxx). Today we could separate these into the struggles for political, social and finally economic rights of citizenship.

Perhaps there is something both in Bernstein’s position and in the Marxist response. The conflict here can be summed up as one between, as commonly described, generalising theory (not at all the same as totalitarianism) and eclecticism.

Isolated phenomena can, indeed, be located within a totality of social phenomena, a total ensemble, but perhaps even Marx’s great design was a simplification in its attempts to grasp this. Perhaps there is a total ensemble, but one that does not by its very essential nature move incessantly forward. The contradictions identified by Marx remain, but barbarism is possible as well as socialism, and with technological progress capitalism develops ever-new ways to sustain and preserve itself. This includes innovation in the field of ideology and social control as well. Capitalism as much as socialism can lapse into totalitarian forms: which not only oppress but also deny historic choice.

As the democratic revisionist socialist theorist, Sheri Berman, argues: “Bernstein’s loss of belief in the inevitability of socialism led him to appreciate the potential for human will and political action”. By comparison, Berman argues that Marx’s and Kautsky’s historical materialism “bred a dangerous political passivity”. Berman suggests, and apparently after the manner of Bernstein, “the primacy of politics” (Berman, pp 14-15). Arguably, this is an unfair criticism, especially of Marx.
An eclectic approach enables us to take what we need from whatever theoretical framework, and apply what we take practically in the pursuit of social change. Indeed, not only can we take what we need but we can interpret it and reshape it in accordance with those needs. Hence, in Bernstein’s time the fusion of Marx and Kant by certain neo-Kantians – the complementing of Marx with Kant – which Kautsky refuted so emphatically.

The Marxist base-superstructure schema itself *may well* provide too much of a simplification and a reduction, by which *everything* hinges finally upon the movement and evolution of the means and mode of production, largely driven by the engine of class struggle. However, arguably there *are* social and economic forces operating at the level of totality – cultural, political, ideological forces all impacting upon one another – on an international and finally, a global scale. Again, for Bernstein these influences are too great and diverse to fully encompass in an economic theory, but just as Bernstein could not categorically refute the existence of such forces, neither should we assume their non-existence. To tar all theories that wrestle with the theme of totality as totalitarian is to vacate the field of global political economy, stigmatising all but token resistance and relegating that resistance to the margins of society. Perhaps rather we should wrestle with totality, but on the basis of a certain modesty, in recognition that in so doing we rely on reductions and abstractions.

**Labour Theory of Value: Objectivist versus Subjectivist Perspectives**

Bernstein’s critique of Marxian economics was extensive, including a revision of Marx’s labour theory of value, a rejection of class bifurcation and a rejection of necessary capitalist collapse. Bernstein made an important contribution to the socialist tradition with a sympathetic critique of Marx’s labour theory of value. Here again, some might accuse Bernstein of eclecticism in his blending of objectivist and subjectivist approaches on the question of economic value. Arguably, though, his position comprises a rational synthesis; comprising a Third Way on the theme of theories of value. That is, his position differs both from orthodox Marxism and from mainstream bourgeois economics.

In *Evolutionary Socialism*, Bernstein critiques Marx’s assumption that value of commodities can be measured according to the labour embedded in them measured according to average socially necessary labour time given the level of human ability and technological development, and with all forms of labour considered equal in this respect with regards to measurement. Bernstein is wary of “abstractions and reductions” in Marx’s concept of value, and even goes so far as to argue this approach ignores the specific use values of commodities. He also questions the supposition that all forms of labour should be considered equal, there being differences in “diligence, activity, equipment of the individual workers”. Kolakowski suggests that Bernstein
believed that Marx’s definition of value was “an expository device” “and not a real social phenomena” (Bernstein, 1961, pp 28-29, Kolakowski, pp 223-225; 438-443).

The consequence of this is that Marx’s labour theory of value is perceived to be a defective measure of concrete exploitation, and one which does not take into account the relative privilege of the labour aristocracy as opposed to those suffering from the most intense exploitation and the most degrading and ruinous working conditions (Bernstein, 1961, pp 33, 39). However, despite his questioning of the abstractions involved in Marx’s labour theory of value, Bernstein emphasizes the continuing validity of the category of surplus value. This – the secret of capitalism discovered by Marx – comprises his analysis of the system of wage labour that “obscures the division of the working day into the work necessary to reproduce labour-power, and the extra, unpaid labour that creates surplus value” (Kolakowski, p 230).

Hence the substance of Bernstein’s Third Way between the Marxist view of exploitation, which identified the mechanism of exploitation but held labour to be of an effective equal abstract value, and the capitalist view, which rationalised exploitation on the basis that capitalists created wealth.

Bernstein proposes to overcome the limitations of Marx’s schema by taking the “value of the total production of society” where the “excess of this value over the total amount of wages of the working classes – that is, not the individual, but the total surplus value” (Bernstein, 1961, p 33). By this reckoning, all kinds of labour are not considered equal. A comprehensive measure of the degree of surplus extraction is impossible in individual cases as there is no prior objective determinant of labour value itself; but nonetheless the mechanism and the reality of surplus-value extraction is observed. The consequence of this is that a measure of the total level of surplus extraction can be established, however.

Bernstein also questions Marx’s emphasis on the sphere of production as distribution and exchange are equally necessary and: “Like division of labour generally, [they raise] the productivity of industrial capital, relatively to the labour directly employed in industry” (Bernstein, 1961, pp 36-37). The consequence of Bernstein’s investigations, here, is a hybrid conception of value: one (as Steger notes) incorporating the objectivist elements of Marx’s labour theory with the subjectivist marginal utility theories of British and Austrian economists such as Stanley Jevons, Carl Menger, and Eugen von Bohm-Bawerk (Steger, p 120).

Again, and most important, in this process Bernstein in no way refutes Marx’s critique of social relations of exploitation. The measure of exploitation is questioned even though reaffirmed at the universal level; but the mechanism remains, both for orthodoxy and for the revisionists. The consequence is an enduring moral case against exploitation as realised through the mechanism of surplus-value extraction, but also a critique of the exploitation of the most ground-down workers, whose exploitation can
be grasped not only by a measurement of the surplus extracted but also by the undervaluing of their work on the labour market. This is the consequence of demand and supply, as well as a lack of labour market regulation and suppression of industrial liberties.

Also remaining is the discovery of “capitalism’s secret” by Marx: The fact that capitalism rests upon the extraction of surplus value from workers. Workers produce the wealth of society, transforming the bounties of nature, but the relationship of capital reproduces itself through the mechanism of exploitation, a portion of the surplus being diverted to dividends to sustain the capitalists’ lifestyles. But a portion is also reinjected in the enterprises concerned – sustaining the economic system and providing the basis for capitalistic economic (and hence political) power.

**Class Bifurcation versus Middle-Class Resilience**

In another famous quote from *Evolutionary Socialism* Bernstein challenges the Marxist thesis of class bifurcation, instead proposing the continued existence of intermediary classes. Yet, he maintains several crucial Marxist economic/analytic categories that strengthen his case as retaining grounding in the Marxist tradition.

Hence:

Greater centralisation of capital, greater concentration of enterprises, increased rate of exploitation. Now is all that right? Yes and no. It is true above all as a tendency. (Bernstein, 1961, pp 41-42)

And in relation to class bi-furcation specifically:

If the working classes wait till ‘Capital’ has put the middle classes out of the world it might really have a long nap. ‘Capital’ would expropriate these classes in one form and then bring them to life again in another. (Bernstein, 1961, pp 50-51)

So, while the middle classes potentially broaden the socio-economic support base of the capitalist class and its preferred mode of production, there is also the imperative for the capitalist classes to nurture and preserve markets for their products in the context of increasing productivity. If the consumption power of the working classes does not increase, then the fruits of increased productivity must be “caught up” in the middle classes (Bernstein, 1961, p 50). Notably, in the future mass production would also demand an ever-increasing level of mass consumption on the part of the working class.
However, Bernstein also remains faithful to many core assumptions and analytical categories of Marxism. Thus:

The fall of the profit rate is a fact, the advent of over-production and crises is a fact, periodic diminution of capital is a fact, the concentration and centralisation of industrial capital is a fact, the increase of the rate of surplus value is a fact. (Bernstein, 1961, pp 41-42)

According to these very arguments, while capitalist contradictions may not be so severe as to render socialism inevitable; certainly socialism is still desirable in the face of said contradictions. Socialism remains the rational choice in the face of over-productive waste, cyclical crises, and a tendency towards monopoly. It is crucial to observe, therefore, that Bernstein’s negotiation of these themes embodied the conflict between principles economic determinism, and of contingency and (literally in the context of free choice) the power of ideals. What is more, his assumption of social gradation of various degrees is negotiated in opposition to the Marxist assumption of class bifurcation providing capitalism – via the working class that it had called into being – with “its own gravediggers”. (Marx and Engels, Vol I, p 124)

To clarify this we will consider the way in which Bernstein works to substantiate his position. In the preface to Evolutionary Socialism Bernstein had provided a succinct rejection of class bifurcation:

The enormous increase of social wealth is not accompanied by a decreasing number of large capitalists but by an increasing number of capitalists of all degrees. The middle classes change their character but they do not disappear from the social scale. (Bernstein, 1961, p xxv)

Bernstein strengthens his case on the resilience of the middle classes by drawing on statistics for Britain and Germany. Although “not all shareholders deserved the name of capitalists”, the British statistics demonstrated an increase in the number of families with high incomes (150 to 1,000 pounds), from 300,000 in 1851 to 990,000 in 1881 (Bernstein, 1961, pp 44-46). Meanwhile, “The British Factory Inspector’s Report for 1896” showed “5 ½ millions of persons engaged in medium and small businesses”, where “at least two-thirds of the businesses registered as factories [belonged] to the category of medium-sized businesses with six to fifty workers” (Bernstein, 1961, pp 54-55). Hence, there existed a variety of tendencies resulting in the resilience of the petty bourgeoisie, though many of them only on “proletarian incomes” (Bernstein, 1961, p 61).

Thus it is that Bernstein made an important contribution to the socialist thought of the time, interrogating the core Marxist assumption of simple class bifurcation. This also has relevance for the tension between positing capitalist collapse or capitalist adaptation. Writing in the 1890s Bernstein supposes that for the time being at least
(perhaps decades), the world market had been so extended by the advance of communications and transport technology that capitalism was better placed to ward away the ever-worsening crises as supposed in the scenarios of orthodox Marxism.

He also marvels at dramatically increased productivity under capitalism, and notes that with “the elasticity of the modern credit system and the rise of industrial cartels…general commercial crises similar to the earlier ones are to be regarded as improbable”. Although cartels are also taken as being the potential “means of monopolist exploitation”; while nonetheless [remedying] overproduction, removing gluts in the market, regulating production with less risk, etc.” And rather than serving as a mechanism to intensify crises, Bernstein supposes with the expanding credit system a new ‘capacity for establishing and creating” (Bernstein, 1961, pp 80-82, p 90).

**Producers’ Co-operatives versus Consumer Co-operatives**

Bernstein held to the validity of various interpretations of socialism: The “juridical notions” (of equality and justice); “characterisation as a social science”; “identification with the class struggle”; “co-operative economics”. Here juridical interpretations are also held to be as important as socialism’s “economic nature” (Bernstein, 1961, pp 95-96). Bernstein was sceptical of producers’ co-operatives as a route to socialism, however. Indeed, he saw co-operative monopolies as providing a potential obstacle to its realisation. With Marx, Bernstein saw co-operative enterprise within the capitalist context as being affected by those same contradictions as private enterprise (although Marx nonetheless recognised their potential to attack the very roots of capitalist exploitation), and with the Fabian activist and intellectual Beatrice Webb, Bernstein supposed that as a consequence of evolving hierarchies within co-operative enterprises – developing in the context of a necessary division of labour – solidarity and the egalitarian spirit would break down (Bernstein, 1961, pp 109-116).

So, in contrast Bernstein supports co-operative stores and trade unions as a means of attacking the absolutism of capital. With regard trade unions, this deepening of democracy was ultimately supposed to extend to direct influence in management, and not to be contained only to wages and conditions. For Bernstein, therefore, the solidarity of proletarians in their capacity as consumers was as necessary as their solidarity in their capacity as producers. Associated consumers, here, (like trade unions) could contain profit rates. (Bernstein, 1961, pp 135-139)

Also important were co-operative producer associations, which, according to Bernstein, had the harmful potential of developing into corporate interests that actually stood in contrast with the interests of the broader community. Wage rises that did not reduce the profit rate but, rather, passed on the costs to the broader community were to be scrutinised. Hence, Bernstein argued that as the “mistress of a whole
branch of production”, unions could become “a monopolist productive association … antagonistic to socialism and democracy”. Here: “Associations against the community are as little socialism as the oligarchic government of the state” (Bernstein, 1961, pp 114-119, 138-141).

A further condition of Bernstein’s analysis here was the presumption of natural public monopolies. This he considered as existing at the municipal level, but as history shows, natural public monopolies were later to arise widely at the national level. While the right of combination remained legitimate for workers in these fields, to have such areas of universal service obligation under a private monopoly (even a co-operative monopoly) could provide unusual privilege and result in a “corruption and a weakening of public spirit” (Bernstein, 1961, pp 192-193).

Thus it is that Bernstein negotiates a perceived conflict between the extension of economic democracy via producers’ co-operatives, and an approach which prefers the mechanism of consumer co-operatives. While he is right to fear the dangers inherent in any monopolistic (worker) productive association, arguably he is too critical and dismissive of producers’ democracy (via producers’ co-operatives or other measures). Producers’ co-operatives need not be monopolistic. This might well mean that there remains competition in the context of producers’ democracy, but in fact this could have the positive implication for continued market signals and discipline driving resource allocation and innovation, but in a context where alienation is reduced, the mechanism of exploitation negated, and productive democracy extended through mechanisms of workers’ control. Also, while there remains the risk of hierarchies in producers’ co-operatives as there is no perfect solution to the division of labour that inevitably arises in any large-scale economic context, democratic mechanisms of accountability could greatly ameliorate these influences.

Therefore, while Bernstein opposes consumers’ co-operatives to producers’ co-operatives it is not necessary to choose one or the other. In the scenario of consumers’ co-operatives alone, in any case there is the threat that employers will respond to such market pressures by simply lifting the rate of exploitation. The answer may be democratic organisation at both the level of production and the level of consumers’ associations. Indeed, it is reasonable to suppose overlap between the two forms, with citizens providing checks and balances against one another in their capacities, both as consumers and producers.

**Reform versus Revolution and Liberalism versus Socialism**

Bernstein, Kautsky and Luxemburg held diverging viewpoints on the themes of revolution and citizenship – hence the conflicting themes of reform/revolution, and universal citizenship versus working class majoritarianism. Some of these themes could well be considered a subset of the broader theme of socialism/liberalism. Yet
importantly there is also the prospect of synthesis/conciliation between socialism and liberalism.

Both Kautsky and Bernstein feared provocations that could have resulted in a violent and repressive reaction by the state and, as Kautsky supposed, a temporary setback for socialism. The age of barricades was apparently over with the modernisation of the world’s militaries and the massive escalation of their destructiveness. Nonetheless, for Kautsky and Luxemburg political revolution, especially in Germany, remained the precondition of socialism and democracy. Arguably, revolution is more complex and substantial than violent and insurrectionary change, though indeed, in the case of a vacuum – of a collapse in the existing state and social order as occurred in Russia 1917 – “wars of movement” (Gramsci’s term; see Pierson (1986) pp 89-91, p 101) remained possible.

Perhaps rather these circumstances embodied necessary alterations in the processes of social change. Revolution was not off the table. Despite the noted military modernisation, Kautsky did not forsake the principle of revolution, and for Rosa Luxemburg the mass strike opened new possibilities. Certainly there developed here an opposition between insurrection and legalism, and later, and opposition between pro-active views of revolution (e.g., the Bolsheviks, Luxemburg), and the perspective of ripening conditions (Kautsky).

Long before the Bolsheviks rose to power in 1917, Bernstein – in contradistinction from Kautsky – so feared any reaction against attempted political revolution derailing the process of gradual democratic evolution that he abandoned revolution itself. Crucially, though, and as earlier observed, Bernstein’s characterisation of revolution is one of a decisive and violent break, of seizure of state power via “unlawful” insurgency (Bernstein; 1961, pp 100-101). Yet, arguably, the substance of revolution is not the means of achieving it, but the actuality of qualitative change. Further, another core point of difference between Bernstein and Kautsky is, in Steenson’s words, that the social question “could not be solved within existing society” (Kautsky cited Steenson, p 78). But Bernstein does not appear to address the question of where a new constitution would come from in the context of his evolutionary schema. Perhaps he simply assumes a series of less fundamental constitutional breaks gradually leading to a substantially transformed constitution, and hence a qualitatively transformed social foundation.

Of central importance in this schema is the development of the proletariat itself. Whereas the modern proletariat was undeveloped and weak during the French Revolution – with the consequence that it held power only briefly in the context of political terror – in the time of Kautsky and Bernstein it appeared to be on a trajectory of becoming the dominant class, numerically and organisationally. This was regardless of the resilience of the middle classes as supposed by Bernstein.
So, Kautsky and Bernstein both supposed the growing preponderance of the working class: A series of advances and political conquests resulting in free speech and association, resulting in growing class consciousness and organisational strength with the workers’ organisation in trade unions. But also, as Marx foreshadowed, as a party (Bernstein; pp 102-103). However, the differentiation within the working class supposed by Bernstein held the potential of undermining the solidarity presumed by Kautsky.

Generalizing this, Bernstein writes that, “with respect to liberalism as a great historical movement, socialism is its legitimate heir, not only in chronological sequence, but also in its spiritual qualities” (Bernstein, n.d., pp 149-150). Thus for Bernstein the pure majoritarianism supposed by Marx’s formulation “found its limits” with “an equality of rights for all members of the community”; this position embodying his liberal instincts, in the ways in which they complemented – rather than negated – his socialist outlook. By this reckoning, true democracy comprised the “absence of class government”; “a social condition where political privilege belongs to no class as opposed to the whole community” (Bernstein, 1961, p 142). Here, suppression of the dominance of the capitalist class, whether through grass-roots action on the part of the working class, or through legislation, need not mean the suspension of the citizenship rights and civil liberties of any individual.

Thus the crucial insistence, that social democracy “labours … incessantly at raising the worker from the social position of a proletarian to that of a citizen, and thus to make citizenship universal”. Here Mouffe and Laclau make a telling observation, that for Bernstein “workers can become subjects as citizens, consumers, etc.”, and hence “the relations between them become an open articulation which offers no a priori guarantee that it will adopt a given form”, although collective identity was (and remains) less precarious than Mouffe and Laclau suppose. For instance, Fordist work practices were (and in some places still are) concrete and lead to specific forms of association and consciousness (Mouffe and Laclau, pp 35-36), even though diversification of experience and thus consciousness was to result (over many decades) in the fragmentation of the working class.

Notably, in the German language there was “no special word for the idea of the citizen with equal civic rights separate from the idea of privileged citizens”. So, this considered, Bernstein’s emphasis on universal citizenship is suggestive of raising proletarians to the level of privilege enjoyed by the upper classes, which is suggestive of economic and social equality as opposed to purely formal political equality. Absence of class government, therefore, also means abolishing the economic privileges of the bourgeoisie that provide it the means of indirectly dominating the political sphere. However, in progressing to said goal, Bernstein aims for a “transition”, “free from convulsive outbursts” “of the modern social order into a higher one” Bernstein, 1961, pp 142-148; Mouffe and Laclau, pp 35-36). Just how
realistic this was is open to question, especially in light of the First World War and the Depression that was to follow.

**Does Reformist Democratic Socialism leave the Door open for Revolution?**

In this final section we will consider Bernstein’s stance on the questions and themes of reform and revolution. In essence, Bernstein argues for a return to Kantian epistemological scepticism when it comes to the presumption of phenomena he considers the realm of metaphysical speculation. Again – and hence perhaps his most severe rupture with Marxism – we see the abandonment of the Marxian dialectic. For Kautsky, Bernstein’s rejection of escalating class bifurcation assumes conditions that would be fatal for socialism; but Bernstein holds bifurcation and immiseration only as being crucial for the realisation of socialism if one accepts the grand dialectical scheme of things (Bernstein, 1961, pp 201-202, 210-212).

Also, while recognising tendencies such as monopolisation, overproduction, intensifying exploitation, cyclic destruction of capital, and of the rate of profit to fall, Bernstein writes of Marx’s arguments in *Capital Volume I*, that – and with regard to “the chapter on the historical tendency of capitalist accumulation” – that it is not in reality “driven to the critical point of the antagonism there depicted” (Bernstein, 1961, pp 41-42, 207-208 [my emphasis]).

Despite his reservations, his proclamation that “actual evolution is really always bringing forth new arrangements, forces, facts”, Bernstein does not rule out the possibility of antagonisms reaching a critical point significantly into the future. He speculates that perhaps: All these “improvements … only create temporary remedies against the oppressive tendencies of capitalism”, remedies “that cannot in the long run effect anything substantially against the critical point of antagonisms laid down by Marx” leading to “catastrophic change by violence”. Hence (Bernstein): “it is impossible simply to declare the one conception right and the other absolutely wrong” (Bernstein; 1961, pp 208-209).

For Kleene, a contemporary of Bernstein writing in 1901, Bernstein remained an advocate of class conflict – even if now only through “legal means”, and he perceived Bernstein’s approach as “democratic rather than … purely proletarian” and without “violence and hatred” (Kleene, pp 25-29). Yet for all this talk about violence and hatred, it was capitalism, capitalists, and the surviving elements of the old order that brought to the world most brutal and costly conflict known at that point in human history.

Indeed, the prospect of catastrophic change, while relished by some is feared by Bernstein, who realises the possibility that it might result, not in socialism but
barbarism. By contrast, Bernstein’s is a constructive socialism who sees a socialist future not in a descent into chaos and crisis as the necessary prelude to change, but in the social development of the means of production, and the growing education and consciousness of the working class. Bernstein perceives obstacles to this progress and to that education of the working class. However, the very development he assumes is grounded in the presumption of a progressive accumulation of working-class victories — for example the reduction of the working week, providing the time and means necessary to partake in culture and develop critical perspectives (Bernstein, 1961, pp 212-213, pp 220-221).

Bernstein considered democracy as “not only the means but also the substance” of socialism. The consequence for him was that in order to achieve real socialism it was a precondition to “build up a nation of democrats” with “the formation of political and social organs of the democracy”. In other words, it was necessary to entrench social-democratic consciousness among the majority working class (Bernstein, 1961, pp 163-165).

**Conclusion: Bernstein’s Legacy**

Bernstein prefers a sceptical empiricism instead of a dialectical materialism that wrestles with totality. He seems to reject hard philosophical materialism in favour of a historical materialism, which takes into account material circumstances but assumes a role for free will within this framework. One consequence of this is a shift from determinist fatalism to a view of socialism as an ethical choice. Further, Bernstein questions the status of the economic base in determining politics and culture, posing the alternative of significant relative autonomy.

Morgan observes that Bernstein’s practical eclecticism was such that the “father of revisionism” never embraced “the final systematising impulse” and in consequence, his reconstruction of Marx’s theory “was in fact never carried through” (Morgan, p 531). Indeed, Bernstein’s emphasis on practical politics often overshadowed or compromised his theoretical output. For instance, his early equivocation in the face of imperialism and colonialism can be read both as an acknowledgement of the progressive and modernising role played by global capitalism, but also as a practical concession to gain political influence and acceptance. Importantly, though, he did become increasingly critical as World War I loomed closer and the likely consequences of imperialist rivalry became more apparent (Fletcher, 1983a, pp 79, 83-84).

Bernstein’s teleological and evolutionary outlook assumes steady and unrelenting progress even amidst the conflicting assumption of contingency. That is he sees reform leading forward as a kind of ‘one way street’. But at the same time Bernstein rejects Marx’s dialectical materialism – which had been the underlying justification
for that assumption. Yet, Bernstein does not entirely deny totality; merely the possibility of grasping it empirically. Amidst this uncertainty, he abandons the final goal of socialism even amidst an assumption that the class struggle is somehow leading forward. More particularly, Bernstein’s work suggests a reconstruction and re-conceptualization of socialism into an endless series of provisional goals animated by enduring underlying principles. So, Bernstein had also written:

A movement without a goal would drift chaotically, for it would be a movement without direction. No goal, no direction! The movement needs a compass, but this goal is not the realisation of a social plan so much as the implementation of a social principle. (Bernstein in Beilharz, p 112)

In the field of economics, Bernstein is truly innovative, developing a synthesis of labour theory of value and utility theory of value. He provides statistical evidence against the class-bifurcation hypothesis, and suggests capitalist adaptation via credit and cartels. Yet, he nonetheless observes continuing tendencies towards monopoly, periodic crisis and destruction of capital, and intensifying rates of exploitation. He does not deny these will reach the critical point at some time far distant, but does not see this happening in the foreseeable future. Thus, he is dismissive of Luxemburg’s protestations. (Yet, again, imperialist tensions were to explode in 1914; there was the Depression from 1929; and the economic crises in the present century.)

As discussed in this chapter, regarding economic democracy, Bernstein preferred consumer co-operatives as the most effective means of securing a fairer economic share for the working class, seeing producers’ co-operatives, by comparison, potentially leading to a reversion to hierarchy, and possibly the abuse of co-operativist monopolies.

Finally, revolution is denied as a violent, ruptural and illegal break, but Bernstein does not deny qualitative change as the ultimate consequence of a culmination of reforms (perhaps even – as Mouffe and Laclau argue – a rapid succession of reforms).

Crucially, modern interpretations of Bernstein often underplay the great extent of the content he retrieved from the Marxist orthodoxy. His retrieval of so much from Marx – the falling rate of profit; overproduction; cyclical crises and periodic diminution of capital; the concentration and centralization of industrial capital; the increase of the rate of surplus value – should not be glossed over. The retrieval of so much that is useful in Marx is a highly valuable legacy, in its unearthing of a variety of Marxist concepts that reformist democratic socialists would otherwise have rejected out of hand, or perhaps not ever engaged with at all.

However, Bernstein’s apparent assumption of unyielding progress seems naïve in light of the developments of more recent decades. Mouffe and Laclau have subjected him to searching criticism on exactly this point. Hence their criticism of his
perspective on “the progressive and ascending character of human history”, coupled with his notion of “evolution” (a progressive teleology), but they further observe that unlike Marxian orthodoxy, progress for Bernstein is based on harmonious processes as well as antagonism (Mouffe and Laclau, p 34).

All of this must be understood in light of the spirit of Bernstein’s age – the influence of confident Marxism, apparently having uncovered the internal dynamics that would lead irresistibly to socialism. Indeed, if nothing else, this very confidence held the prospect of encouraging a self-fulfilling prophecy of socialist transition. Meanwhile, his abandonment of a single final goal for socialism upholds the idea of a moral or political compass, and suggests adaptation to changing circumstances in pursuit of socialist principles.

Bernstein’s economic innovations with regard to the labour theory of value remain of theoretical interest, maintaining the objective fact of surplus value with the resulting moral implications. This remains a valuable legacy in providing a moral foundation for socialism today.

However, Bernstein’s scepticism with regard to the potential of producers co-operatives is disappointing, and regardless of the fact that his treatment of consumer co-operatives charted important terrain neglected by some Marxists (though not all) – who have been constrained by a narrow productivism. As noted, there is the alternative prospect, of new forms of democratic economic organisation based on the importance of ‘the people’ both in their capacity as consumers and as producers and, indeed, in their capacity as citizens.

Bernstein’s legacy is thus valuable in a number of respects: providing an alternative theoretical framework for (reformist) democratic socialism, and imagining greater contingency, and greater autonomy for politics. In the words of Mouffe and Laclau, this “represented a real effort to break with the corporative isolation of the working class.” In so doing, Bernstein averted the tendency to see social evolution as a closed system, and even despite his assumption that progress was a one-way street (Mouffe and Laclau, pp 30-35). He does not deny totality, but merely the capacity to grasp it comprehensively and empirically through Marx’s theory. It is a perspective that may be relevant in responding to postmodern scepticism today, providing the basis for acting upon meta-narratives and grasping large-scale social phenomena even in the face of a sceptical epistemology.

Most important, the legacies of Bernstein include his provision of a theoretical lens through which to grasp the social debates and social phenomena of his age. A more radical reading of Bernstein may even be important for modern-day socialists searching for a theoretical foundation to bridge the gap between reform and revolution. The substance of the meaning of revolution is contested: Does it mean violent, illegal and insurrectionary seizure of state power? Or is it the substance of
qualitative change no matter how it is arrived at? In this sense, Bernstein provides a meaningful Third Way, a powerful legacy in itself. The consequence of a more nuanced view with regard to the question of reform versus revolution is the prospect of a revolutionary reformism. This can be interpreted in a number of ways. First, it could be considered that non-exploitative and democratic economic forms (perhaps through a mix of co-operative, democratic and public enterprise) rise to a dominant position in a given national economy. Second, it could be considered in the sense of political reform of the state – a struggle within to the point at which the state itself no longer poses an active obstacle to democratic change.

It is clear that while Luxemburg saw revolution as a necessity in order to avoid barbarism, the Bernsteinian perspective, by prioritising reforms to ameliorate class tensions, may prevent Marx’s scenario (and one that rarely is talked about) of the “mutual ruin of the contending classes” (Ferguson, p 531). Rosa Luxemburg, it seems, had no doubt when it came to the opposition between reform and revolution, and she made it her views on Bernstein’s evolutionary outlook quite clear. It is to her that the discussion now turns, and especially her response to revisionism with her famous Reform or Revolution.
Chapter Four:

Rosa Luxemburg – Reform or Revolution?

This chapter analyses the historic, theoretical contribution of Rosa Luxemburg to Marxism and social democracy, especially her response to the revisionist controversy, and her theorization of the place of spontaneity in revolution. The chapter begins with a brief biographical background followed by an analysis of how and why her contribution can be considered a relative Third Road. Thereafter, is the analysis of two of her major works: Reform or Revolution and The Mass Strike.

Reform or Revolution is one of the seminal texts of the ‘revisionist controversy’, which entailed a split from the Marxian orthodoxy by Eduard Bernstein, with his positing of a reformist and evolutionary alternative; and Luxemburg’s response, a scathing defence of a revolutionary viewpoint. A number of important themes arise within Luxemburg’s work, including:

- Idealism versus scientific socialism or dialectical materialism;
- Socialism conceived as a moral ought in a world marked by voluntarism and contingency versus the objective necessity of socialism;
- Supposed capitalist adaptation versus the orthodox Marxist supposition of capitalist breakdown and collapse; and
- Gradual accumulation of reforms versus ruptural displacement of capitalism.

This discussion is followed by further elaboration on the theme of necessity as embodied in capitalist contradictions identified by Marx, and additional factors observed by Luxemburg herself: specifically, her reference to the credit system, overproduction, monopolisation and the consequent exhaustion of capitalism’s progressive economic role. Thereafter, the key theme of reform/revolution is explored in depth; including an analysis of Luxemburg’s refutation of Bernstein’s reformism (and reformism generally); and the author’s own proposal of a synthesis of the two concepts in theory and practice. Following this analysis of the question of reform and revolution, discussion moves to other works during the period in question that were seminal contributions to the Luxemburgian school of thought. Finally, are the valuable legacies Rosa Luxemburg has left in the form of her works during the period 1880-1906. These including her libertarian variant on Marxism, and her defence of revolutionary Marxism against Bernstein’s revisionism. In concluding, the chapter also considered fruitful syntheses that may be applied when considering the works of
Luxemburg and Bernstein. Rosa Luxemburg’s steadfast opposition to revisionism and her libertarian critique of Bolshevist centralism – these establish her as one of the most original, insightful and passionate Marxist thinkers.

**Luxemburg’s Politics**

Born in 1871 to a Jewish family, Luxemburg originally participated in the Polish socialist movement and swiftly moved to involve herself in the Second International. She spent time in Switzerland, France and ultimately Germany, and was involved with other exiles including Lenin, Plekanov, and Axelrod. Luxemburg relocated to Germany in 1898 to take part in the world socialist movement through activism in the SPD. Indeed, she became one of the most prominent teachers at the SPD school. From the beginning, hers was an uncompromising internationalism: which put her at odds with Polish socialists who prioritised the national liberation struggle (Hudis and Anderson, pp 8-9; Wolfe, pp 212-213; Rousseas, p 12).

Luxemburg recounted that the political general strike of January 1905 was outwardly “a political act of the revolutionary declaration of war on absolutism”. Ultimately, that conflict splintered into a mass of local economic struggles. Here Luxemburg challenged the accepted social-democratic wisdom that ‘the decay of the great political general strike of January 1905 into a number of economic struggles was probably “a great mistake”’ (Luxemburg in Hudis and Andersen, pp 180-181). These strikes, Luxemburg recalled, were kindled in response to a number of issues. There was a fight for better wages, against working in one’s home, for an eight-hour day, and against cruel labour discipline in the workplace. Most important, Luxemburg insisted, the movement had a *spontaneous* element. Rather than the economic struggle *excluding* the political struggle, Luxemburg declares: “Between the two there is the most complete reciprocal action” (Luxemburg in Hudis and Andersen, pp 194-195).

In summary, hers was a life bound up with the politics of her time. In 1906 she penned *The Mass Strike*, a book that was to stand the test of time as a Marxist classic. There she proposes a spontaneous element to working-class revolutionary action, not “arising without cause”, but nonetheless unpredictably from underlying class struggle. This work involved conflicting themes of relative spontaneity as distinct from deliberate, methodical, organised action. Luxemburg’s analysis of the struggles involved in the 1905 Russian Revolution and the strikes of 1903 and 1904 have been summed up by other Marxists as Luxemburg’s theory of the “spontaneity of the masses” (Geras, pp 111-112).

**Luxemburg’s ‘Libertarian Marxism’ as a Third Road**

Luxemburg’s response to these themes can be considered a Third Road on a number of grounds. Though the Luxemburgian Third Road was only to emerge fully in the
context of her controversies with the Bolsheviks, even at this early stage – the time of
the revisionist controversy and the 1906 Russian Revolution – her position was
distinctive.

Her concept of revolution was such that it can be thought of as a Third Road rather
than a Third Way at the time of writing Social Reform or Revolution (1898-1899) and
The Mass Strike (1906). She was in sympathy with the Second Way final goals of
orthodox Marxism, while at the same time embracing methods that innovatively
envisioned political leadership in the form of constant adaptation by Social Democrats
to spontaneous working-class initiative. However, with the later rise of Stalinism and
socialism in one country, the Second Way itself shifted. After her death, Luxemburg’s
position became a beacon for a libertarian socialism in contrast with Stalinist practice.
Stalinism claimed its continuing adherence to the final communist goal of Marxism,
and in that sense – in definitional terms – Luxemburg’s position may still be
favourably interpreted as having comprised a Third Road after her death in
comparison with its brutality. Others might even argue that Stalinism so distorted
Marxism, and that in comparison, Luxemburg’s libertarian Marxism loomed rather
more as a Third Way. That is, it diverged radically on account of Stalinism’s effective
abandonment of the authentic communism of Marx. Either view arguably can be
considered legitimate on the grounds of its own internally consistent assumptions.

Regarding necessity: Marxism, in the same vein as Hegelianism, has been accused of
posing a closed vision of the future. Bernstein’s scepticism about the possibility of
grasping, perceiving and expressing totality is met by Luxemburg with an affirmation
of dialectical materialism, and the expressive capacity of Marx’s theory in pointing to
the driving force throughout history – again, the evolving mode of production, driven
by class struggle and technological innovation. For Luxemburg, Bernstein’s
revisionism neglected the movement of capitalism as an organic whole.

In turn, this leads to the conflicting themes of scientific socialism and idealism. Marx
sought to affirm his approach’s scientific status on a number of grounds, but most
significantly in his theory of (dialectical) historical materialism. In this approach and
by analysis of the material/economic contradictions of capitalism, Marx felt he had
established the necessity of socialism. Bernstein had posited socialism as a moral and
possible ‘ought’ (i.e: a choice, or a possibility – rather than an inevitability) in the face
of a future that was contingent (though again Bernstein still believed it was possible
that capitalism’s contradictions could grow extreme so as to render socialism
objectively necessary at some time in the future, and he also assumed a progressive
teleology). In the face of Bernstein’s assertions, Luxemburg was to contend firstly
that there was the potential for cartels and monopolies to exploit and gouge
consumers; and secondly, that contradictions would develop between nation-based
cartels and the interests of the world market. She also saw credit as exacerbating,
transmitting and magnifying capitalist crises rather than solving them, even though
credit was essential to the next step in the expansion of world trade.
In the treatment of Luxemburg intended, the conflicting themes of reform and revolution are paramount. Rosa Luxemburg could not accept concepts such as slow revolution such as the Austro-Marxists later adopted, which envisaged such interpenetration between reform and revolution that they merged as one overarching process. The bottom line – that is, the prime imperative -for Luxemburg was the suppression of the wage system as the substance of revolution. This entailed the full negation of capitalist expropriation of surplus value from workers, not merely the “diminution” of exploitation (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, p 157). To achieve this, Luxemburg perceived the need for a new constitution, as had been the case with prior revolutions such as in France 1789. Piecemeal parliamentary reform would not deliver this political revolution. A decisive political break required the laying of new foundations for political economy.

An analysis of Reform of Revolution is revealing of the substance of Luxemburg’s arguments; thereafter the examine turns to those other critical aspects of her thought as developed in The Mass Strike, which at the time further consolidated the status of her perspective as those of a genuine Third Road writer.

**Objective Necessity versus Contingency and ‘Moral Ought’**

Luxemburg begins Social Reform or Revolution, published 1899, with an attack on Bernstein’s abandonment of socialism’s final aim. For Luxemburg, Bernstein had abandoned the only thing distinguishing social democracy from bourgeois liberalism (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, pp 8-10, 128-129, 167). Her case hinges heavily on the argument that it is objective economic necessity that will drive the transition to socialism, rather than “the victorious violence of a minority”, or even “through [the] … numerical superiority” of the proletariat”(Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, p 133, 149). In this is discernible the origins of her later conflict with Lenin.

Luxemburg’s position also puts her at odds with modern post-Marxism, which is interesting to consider in light of the usefulness her legacy – her analysis for the modern day. Mouffe and Laclau observe of her “spontaneism” that “movements … emerged at un-preconceived points and tended to expand beyond the capacity of regulation and organisation of any political or trade union leadership”. Hence while the working class is often fragmented, “this movement of feedback and interaction” is meant to guarantee “the unity of the working class” in the process of revolution (Mouffe and Laclau, pp 8-9).

However, in refuting Luxemburg’s assumptions, Mouffe and Laclau argue that “Spontaneism has an element of contingency – but necessity excludes contingency” (Mouffe and Laclau, p 12). Thus, although Luxemburg accepts uncertainty on the
question, “socialism or barbarism?” they argue that there are irreconcilable contradictions in her theory. Contra-Luxemburg, Mouffe and Laclau also deny that the working class will achieve a unified subjecthood, even in the midst of revolution. They propose a perspective whereby the “the class nature of political subjects loses its necessary character.” To substantiate this they observe “the rise of fascism, which would brutally dispel the illusion of the necessary character of certain class articulations” (Mouffe and Laclau, p 13; My emphasis).

Yet, there is a positive side to this equation: If subject positions can be constructed by the radical Right, so, too, can they be constructed by an amalgam of left/progressive forces. Therefore, “new forms of struggle in the advanced capitalist world” with the “emergence of new forms of political subjectivity cutting across the categories of the social and economic structure” (Mouffe and Laclau, p 13). Against Mouffe and Laclau, such doubts can also be responded to by recourse to the old distinction between “class in itself” and “class for itself”. While Mouffe and Laclau reject essential interests, it is difficult not to perceive clear interests in the distributive struggle under capitalism.

Luxemburg accuses Bernstein of analysing isolated phenomena and thereby failing to grasp the historical movement involved in the totality of social and economic forces. Specifically, Luxemburg accuses Bernstein of being eclectic and thus abandoning “the class standpoint”, “the proud and admirable symmetric construction of the Marxist system” from which it is possible to grasp this historic movement (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, p 161). (Again, there is a stark contrast between Marxism and post-structuralist post-Marxism. The latter rejects necessary teleology and closure, where no single variable is central to the movement of history. Here there is always an element of doubt given the general acceptance of radical contingency and voluntarism.)

Radically distinct from Bernstein’s assumptions of capitalist adaptation through technological and organisational advancement, Luxemburg sees the internal logic of capitalism and the daily struggles of the working class as necessarily leading to capitalist breakdown and socialist transition through the democratic suppression of those contradictions. Without such a breakdown, Luxemburg considered expropriation of the capitalists impossible – thus providing an unambiguous rationale for her objection to Bernstein’s hypotheses on capitalist adaptation (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, p 160).

Yet, while she sees socialism as necessary, this does not mark her as a fatalist (Ferguson, pp 526-527). For her, the total movement of social relations makes socialism necessary, as the substance of human liberation, but there is still the element of choice and uncertainty, and barbarism is also a possible consequence of capitalist contradictions, and of the attempts of rival capitalists to incessantly expand and dominate the world market.
Luxemburg concedes that revisionism (especially Bernstein’s) does not “defend capitalist relations” or deny “the existence of the contradictions of capitalism”. However, it denies this very process of necessary development and revolutionary suppression/transition. Without any objective necessity, Luxemburg sees socialism as reduced to an ideal and a utopia (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, pp 134, 141-142). While Bernstein himself rejects utopian final goals, his provisional and evolving objectives are presumed to be realisable through a gradual accumulation of reforms: Reducing the scale of exploitation, extending social control, and ultimately removing from capitalist society its very capitalist character. By contrast, Luxemburg thinks that the practice of reformism sees immediate practical results completely overshadowing the real seizure of power, the class perspective and the transition to a qualitatively different (socialist) order. Indeed, the revolutionary perspective is seen as obstructing and inhibiting the achievement of immediate, practical reforms. (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, pp 140-142)

Thus it was that Luxemburg held to a firm-line on the role of the state under capitalism, where, as “an organ of the capitalist class” it could not but represent that class interest. Reforms would be granted only in so far as they protected that interest; and hence, “no amount of reform” would lead to socialism (Kolakowski, p 417).

Here she was at odds with the Austro-Marxist, Otto Bauer, who later considered the possibility of slow revolution and an equilibrium of class power in economy and civil society providing a window of opportunity for change. Here, reform and revolution were not necessarily exclusive of each other, especially if reforms mobilised the confidence of the working class, in the context of a discourse of slow revolution. Here a transitional economy could conceivably comprise some kind of hybrid (Gruber, pp 37-41). As with Kautsky, Luxemburg could not accept this abandonment of the notion that history and necessity were on the side of socialism, with the consequent demoralisation of the socialist movement. For her, socialism could not be a mere choice – that would be to see it as an ideal to aspire to in a present where the future was open and contingent – but a necessity uncovered by the scientific realisation of the contradictions and tendencies inherent in capitalism.

In refuting Bernstein, Luxemburg mentions three tendencies in capitalism as “the scientific basis of socialism”:

- “growing anarchy of the capitalist economy”;
- “the progressive socialisation of the process of production, which creates the germs of the future social order”; and
- “the growing organisation and class consciousness of the proletariat, which constitutes the active factor in the coming revolution”.

(Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, p 132)
Crucially, while accepting the last two of these tendencies, Bernstein questions the first, and with it the objective necessity of socialism. Without the assumption of some general collapse through economic catastrophe or war – with socialists “stepping into the breach” – Luxemburg asserts that all that remains for Bernstein is the gradual improvement and amelioration of the condition of the working class through the trade-union struggle, parliamentary work and the establishment of consumers’ co-operatives (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, p 131).

This seems to have Luxemburg putting her hopes on a determinist vision of socialist transition. For her, without assumed capitalist breakdown there is the loss of socialist hope. Socialism for Luxemburg is predicated on the negation of capitalism; and not simply the affirmation of a series of reforms (Ferguson, p 511).

The Means and Processes of Capitalist Breakdown

How exactly was capitalism meant to break down in Rosa Luxemburg’s vision of necessary socialist transition? She returns to Marx but makes a number of alterations. Marx had argued that the value of commodities consisted of three parts: constant capital (the value of the actual means of production), variable capital (that is, wages), and surplus value – ”the increase of value due to the unremunerated portion of wage labour.” That is: “Value = C+V+S”. In *Capital* Marx divided the capitalist economy into two departments: Department I being production of the means of production and Department II being production of consumer goods. Here there exists a relationship of interdependence where “they must remain in a specific proportion so that the process of production may continue harmoniously” (Kolakowski, pp 408-409). Arguably, capitalist crisis emerges when the cost of the modernisation of constant capital (Department I) reaches disproportionate levels, though that is ameliorated by the tendency towards monopoly, with greater economies of scale.

However, as Kolakowski argues, capitalism needs to expand to fuel the accumulation process: “Industry cannot go on creating its own market [forever]; [and] what is produced must be consumed.” Further, he expresses Luxemburg’s interpretation of world capitalism, where “all countries are an internal market” (Kolakowski, p 409). For Luxemburg, this problem was also fuelled by an impoverished working class and unproductive stratum, for example, landowners, civil servants and soldiers, from whom a surplus is not extracted in any case. Therefore, Luxemburg suggests there is an objective limit to capitalist accumulation. Accumulation “hits a brick wall” (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, pp 60-61; Geras, N p 15); in the form of the limits to consumption. Kolakowski explains how in this scenario of Luxemburg’s there is the need for a market external to both Department I and Department II, and the objective limits to accumulation and consumption spell the end for capitalism.
This raises questions pertaining to the capitalist system’s very survival. For a time at least capitalistic systemic reproduction is delivered through markets external to capitalism itself, for example, pre-capitalist economies, and hyper-exploitation of pre-capitalist classes. Although Marx insisted that capitalism was rapacious in transforming the whole world after its own image, even considering this, capitalism has found a way.

Importantly, at times during the twentieth century, fascist regimes have buoyed their economies with labour conscription, state consumption through armament, and organised economies in the context of war. This has fulfilled capitalism’s systemic imperatives even while depriving people of use values, in effect ruining the life-world (Habermas). (In other words, human needs go beyond the mere expansion of production; especially under circumstances of terrible human cost) Yet, capitalism has survived without fascism as well. Luxemburg was correct to identify the problem of limits to consumption, though for a long time this problem has been overcome by the structuring/stratification of internal (national) markets and also the global market. This resonates with her argument regarding the exploitation of non-capitalist economies by capitalists from her work, ‘The Accumulation of Capital’. (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, pp 60-63) The Third World, as it came to be called – and now the Global South – is plundered for its human and material resources. In advanced core economies, meanwhile, the living standards of the middle classes often rest partly upon intense exploitation of the working poor.

Capitalism has truly globalized, but in so doing the core capitalist economies have structurally externalised various national economies and within themselves have externalised their own dispossessed and working poor. In other words impoverished countries are ruthlessly exploited for their resources and their labour – and this intensified exploitation provides for such material living standards that maintain prosperity – and hence stability – in the ‘core’ capitalist countries.

Further, in some countries (the United States being perhaps the most striking example) the living standards of the middle classes, and even of parts of the working class, are maintained by the thorough and quite extreme exploitation of the working poor. Further pertaining to the United States the most threadbare regime of social welfare contributes to a scenario where labour is disciplined; and resources are ‘freed up’ to be diverted to ‘the prosperous classes’ and provide for the further accumulation of capital. The ‘prosperous’ classes, here, provide the social base of political stability.

But again, in the United States and elsewhere technology and productivity have also helped to preserve the system. Here, on the one hand Luxemburg grasped the
underlying tendencies, part of an enduring legacy. On the other hand she did not anticipate the ways and means of capitalist adaptation in the decades that followed.

Resuming consideration of Rosa Luxemburg’s prognosis for capitalism: With the onset of the Great War in 1914 and with the accelerating descent into barbarism in the ensuing years, the possibility of a general collapse finally loomed. For Marxists such as Luxemburg, the dominance of markets through imperialist policy was more than a choice – it was a systemic imperative. This placed Bernstein in opposition to Luxemburg on the grounds that he believed open (and democratic) diplomacy could prevent war, or once war had began, it could provide the basis for a separate peace (Fletcher, 1983b, p 577; 1983a, pp 81-82).

Importantly, though, Luxemburg arguably diverged from Lenin in her understanding of class consciousness and socialist consciousness. Kathy Ferguson (Currently a Hawaii based progressive Feminist academic) discusses “true consciousness” as the grasping of the total movement of social relations (presumably towards socialism). More specifically she portrays Luxemburg as striving for “a higher dialectical synthesis” and in that process, overcoming both Bernstein’s rejection of the idea of a consciousness of some movement of social totality on the one hand and also of Lenin’s counter-supposition that such consciousness could exist but had to be introduced to the proletariat from without. So, by contrast Luxemburg is held by Ferguson to see socialist consciousness as “a kind of moral force”, “with objectively correct content”, but “not the property of an elite”; instead, “available to all” – developing through the course of class struggle. In recent decades, however, the decline of socialism and of labour movements has also led to the decline of critical consciousness parallel to the ebbing away of class struggle. In any case the historical contestation between competing socialists movements (Menshevik, left social democratic; Leninist; anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist) suggests “true consciousness” may be difficult to pinpoint, and attempts to enforce a correct line have resulted in repression (Ferguson, pp 506-509, p 517, p 525).

Objective Necessity versus Contingency and ‘Moral Ought’

Luxemburg responds to Bernstein’s claims regarding capitalist adaptation by emphasizing capitalism’s anarchic tendencies, and consequently, socialism’s enduring objective necessity. With regard to the credit system, for example, Luxemburg acknowledges that credit can help “increase the capacity to expand production and to facilitate exchange”. Indeed, it is crucial for the ongoing expansion of the world market in exactly this sense – breaking through “the barrier” provided by “the limited size of private capital”. It is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the continuance of capitalism. Elaborating in eloquent fashion, Luxemburg argues:
Speaking very generally, the specific function of credit is nothing but the elimination of the remaining rigidity of capitalist relationships … It renders all forces extendable, relative, and sensitive to the highest degree ... Hence it facilitates and aggravates crises. (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, p 135)

Thence Luxemburg asserts that after having provoked overproduction, during crises, “credit (as mediator of the process of exchange) destroys … the very productive forces it … created.” With stagnation “credit melts away”; “it reduces the consumption capacity of the market to a minimum.” What is more, credit can also lead to “reckless speculation” utilising “the property of others”, and “it also helps to bring on and extend the crisis by transforming all exchange into an extremely complex and artificial mechanism … [which is] easily disarranged at the slightest occasion”(Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, pp 134-135).

Meanwhile, in a similar manner to Bernstein she perceives a clash between consumer and producer interests, presumably with the potential for profit-gouging by cartels. Increased employer organisation meanwhile strengthens the hand of capital against labour. Crucially Luxemburg perceives a contradiction between the interests of the world market and the interests of national-capitalist states, with the consequence of tariff wars, which are damaging to that world market (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, pp 137-138). Further, the same cartels maintain their rates of profit in internal markets by clearing/selling their excess product on international markets at a discount. Luxemburg concludes:

The result is the sharpening of competition abroad and an increased anarchy on the world market – the very opposite of what is intended. (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, p 138)

Finally, regarding Bernstein’s emphasis on the survival of small and medium enterprises, Luxemburg focuses upon a perceived dialectical movement involving complex contradictions; hence “two antagonistic tendencies, one ascendant and the other descendent”. (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, pp 138-139). With the descendent tendency there is an ongoing expansion of “the … scale of production which periodically overflows the dimensions of average-size capital and removes it repeatedly from the competitive terrain.” The ascendant tendency involves a “periodic depreciation of existing capital” lowering “for a certain time, the scale of production in proportion to the value of the necessary minimum amount of capital.” In other words, there is a “periodic mowing down of small capital, which rapidly grows up again only to be mowed down once more by large industry” (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, pp 138-139). We can perceive these same movements today in the constant process by which monopolies and oligopolies are reinforced by the swallowing up of new competitors.
However, the consequence of this process need not be an absolute decline in the number of the middle-sized capitalists. Small and middle-sized enterprises continue to arise in new branches of production. The modern example of information technology and the social networking market is instructive on the point. Facebook, for instance, captured a relatively new market – before that market had ossified into monopoly. In Luxemburg’s terms, an increasing amount of capital investment is needed to maintain and initiate enterprises in the established branches of production (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, p 139). Take, for instance, the necessary modern economies of scale, including for research and development associated with the automobile industry or with microprocessors and other technological hardware.

Presumably, because of accelerated technological change, Luxemburg perceived an ever-shortening window of opportunity for small capitalists to develop in new branches of industry. The result is the prevalence of the descendent tendency, and as scale and concentration increases, competition declines. Hence, in Luxemburg’s world view, ultimately there is stagnation with regards innovation (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, p 139). (Although again, in relation to Luxemburg’s theory and its relevance as an enduring legacy, it should be noted that in the modern day – with the utmost extension of the world market – there are instances of competition prevailing even amidst a global oligopoly (for instance in the IT market; with Apple, Samsung, Google, and Microsoft, etc.).

Bernstein hopes for a gradual amelioration of capitalist contradictions leading to socialism, but for Luxemburg it is those very contradictions that drive capitalist development – they are inseparable from capitalism. According to the Marxist schema those crises must ever grow in their proportion to mobilise the working class and provoke the suppression of the contradictions involved through a democratic proletarian class dictatorship, and with an ensuing socialist transition. More specifically, however, within the bounds of capitalism it is those very crises which “periodically [solve] the conflict between the unlimited extension of production and the narrow limits of the market” (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, 144-145). Again, the objective necessity of socialism is in permanently resolving such crises.

Reform versus Revolution

As opposed to Bernstein, Luxemburg is insistent that the proletariat must conquer power. Universal suffrage might well be a step forward, but unless the state power – indeed, the state apparatus – is conquered, any electoral majority could well be for nought. Norman Geras writes:

The question of the conquest of power, of the dictatorship of the proletariat, had therefore to be posed independently … rather than being assumed to be the organic product of the daily struggle for minimum demands and reforms. (Geras, p 116)
In Geras’s worldview, the historic division into minimum and maximum social-democratic programmes led ultimately to the reduction of actual transition; actual conquest of power, to “mere phraseology”, with the minimum programme forming the substance – merely ameliorative reforms. It was a dualism he personally believed Luxemburg had overcome (Geras, p 117).

Luxemburg is scathing of any blurring of the lines between reform and revolution. She argues:

Legal reform and revolution are not different methods of historical progress that can be picked out at pleasure from the counter of history, just as one chooses hot or cold sausages … They are different moments in the development of class society which condition and complement each other, and at the same time exclude each other reciprocally … In effect every legal constitution is the product of a revolution … During every historical period, work for reforms … is carried on only in the framework of the social form created by the last revolution. (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, pp 155-156)

Therefore:

It is absolutely false and totally unhistorical to represent work for reforms as a drawn-out-revolution, and revolution as a condensed series of reforms (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, p 156).

According to Luxemburg, therefore, reforms and revolution differ in their “essence” (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, pp 156-157). Thus it is that Luxemburg accuses the “father of revisionism” of a monism, which is “the unity of the eternalised capitalist order” (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, p 151). In this context, Luxemburg constructs liberalism as the ideology of the bourgeoisie (which is interesting given her libertarian approach to socialism). Hence, she supposes that the Bernsteinian conflation of liberalism with socialism denies a qualitative break – instead suggesting a “reconciliation” with “the transfer of hope to the beyond of an ethical-ideal world” (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, p 162).

In conclusion, Luxemburg reaffirms her notion of socialism as a fundamentally different socio-economic order, founded not through the piecemeal reform of capitalism (as she characterises Bernstein), but through a qualitative revolutionary break. Hence socialism for Luxemburg involves “the suppression of the wage system” and not merely “the diminution of exploitation” (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, p 157); but, again, the conditions necessary for the inferred expropriation of the capitalists suggested here arise through capitalist contradictions, and are overcome via the democratic suppression of those contradictions. Thereby the working class organised democratically as a party wrests the means of production, by degrees, from
the bourgeoisie and implements a qualitatively different – planned and democratic – economic order.

**Methodical Organisation versus Spontaneity**

At the heart of Luxemburg’s analysis in *The Mass Strike* is her vision of the school of life-experience, where militant workers gained confidence, class consciousness, social awareness and understanding through the process of real struggle. Here even defeats are valuable in preparing the workers for future action. Rather than directing and initiating the revolutionary upheaval through organisation and discipline as Karl Kautsky envisaged as the ultimate case in Germany, events in Russia often ran ahead of the revolutionary cadres.

Not that Luxemburg rejected organisation as such. She just denied the idea that revolutions could be neat and tidy. This enhances her position as comprising a Third Road for her time – in contradistinction to the Kautskyan Marxist orthodoxy, which proposed methodical organisational work, building one stronghold after another until working-class organisation was overwhelming. For Rosa Luxemburg such deliberate organisational work may yield brief political strike action, or maybe a mass protest, but revolutions were a different creature entirely (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, pp 196-197).

Another theme detectable by comparing Luxemburg and other Marxists and socialists is her willingness to accept, for the sake of turning class relations on their head, what others would depict as chaos. Echoing Lassalle, Luxemburg supposed if revolution meant *a new constitution*, then the old order would need to be torn down or would collapse in a more or less rapid fashion. Amidst this chaos, Luxemburg sees the struggle as becoming the focus for new organisation among the workers.

For Luxemburg the mass strike ought not to be taken in isolation, but ought be located in the broader class struggle, and specifically a “period of revolution”. The underlying causes of the revolution here are the class struggle itself, called into being by capitalist contradictions and the brutal, alienating nature of capitalism at this stage of its development. Revolutionary “explosions”, as Luxemburg describes them, are *unpredictable*. Instead of leading the movement as a field marshal directs their troops, social-democratic cadres are called upon by Luxemburg to exercise “the most adroit adaptability to the given situation, and the closest possible contact with the mood of the masses”. It is in this fashion that she calls upon social-democratic parties to exercise political leadership; not searching in vain for a “mechanism” but helping to harness the spontaneous risings among the working class; to provide a focus for new organisation amidst the confusion of the battle; the “crumbling of the social foundation.” Here for Luxemburg, firm leadership and initiative gives rise to confidence, but vacillating weakness and lack of faith in the working class “has a
crippling and confusing effect.” The mass strike is “the form of the revolutionary struggle” (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, pp 92, 198-199). Hence, hers is not a faith in spontaneism taken outside of the context of the necessary revolutionary leadership and the mobilising influence of underlying capitalist contradictions.

A couple of quotes from Luxemburg demonstrate this view and how she applied it to the 1905 Russian Revolution. These quotes also underscore her interpretation of dialectics as applied to this struggle. Hence Luxemburg’s graphic rhetorical language, depicting the struggles in Russia from 1903-1905:

It flows now like a broad billow over the whole kingdom, and now divides into a gigantic network of narrow streams; now it bubbles forth from under the ground like a fresh spring and now is completely lost under the earth. Political and economic strikes, mass strikes and partial strikes, demonstrative strikes and fighting strikes, general strikes of individual branches of industry and general strikes [in] individual towns, peaceful wage struggles and street massacres, barricade fighting – all these run through one another, run side by side, cross one another, flow into one another – it is [a] ceaselessly moving, and changing sea of phenomenon. (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, pp 191)

In a further rendition of the dialectical approach, partly echoing Engels from *Anti-Duhring*:

In a word, the economic struggle is the transmitter from one political center to another; the political struggle is the periodic fertilisation of the soil for the economic struggle. Cause and effect here continually change places; (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, p 195)

Luxemburg contends that social-democratic theorists’ attempts to isolate and develop a purely political struggle, by this very dissection would “not perceive the phenomenon in its living essence, but will kill it altogether.” This is similar to her critique of Bernstein’s empiricist eclecticism – taking the parts in isolation rather than the living whole ensemble of social and economic forces. Amidst all this, Luxemburg perceives an organic totality (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, p 195). Rather than a naïve faith in spontaneity, Luxemburg’s position is nuanced and complex, tracing the manner in which cause and effect are constantly switching places.

In response to Luxemburg and in surmising her defensible legacy, a number of observations spring to mind. Spontaneous action is a fact – not in the sense of having no cause, but in the sense of erupting or being triggered suddenly as a consequence of underlying contradictions and tensions. Whether more recently in Egypt or in Paris in 1968, or with the spread of struggle like wildfire in Russia 1905, revolution is not a simple thing. It is not something that can easily be produced, at will, by political parties. Indeed, her insights here remain as an important legacy because of their
potential modern-day applications. The internet and modern social networking technology, if anything, enhance the prospect of spontaneous social movements developing organically, again with cause and effect constantly switching places in dialectical fashion. Luxemburg’s nuanced dialectical approach comprises a substantial legacy for the Marxian movement.

Norman Geras makes a telling reading of Luxemburg where he argues that:

[She] was the very first to draw the lessons of 1905 for advanced capitalist countries and to begin to pose the question of power there in a serious and no longer purely propagandist way. She was the first to challenge the facile optimism of peaceful linear growth implicit in the tactics of German Social Democracy. (Geras, p 124)

These are not simple questions, therefore. It is clear that there are arguments that can be marshalled in defence of the Bolsheviks and, indeed, in defence of Luxemburg’s position. It should also be observed that at times social collapse and catastrophe are not choices, but sometimes they are simply facts that must be dealt with.

In contrast to the example of Russia in 1917, arguably there can also be a degree of collapse, and to the point where a new constitution becomes possible, but nonetheless the practical state apparatus of everyday administration remains in place. Further, there is the prospect of progressive revolution by degrees, with one stronghold captured after another. Also there are other manifestations or models of revolution as qualitative change than the example of Russia in 1917.

In summary, it is not a choice between long-term organisational work and consciousness-raising as against spontaneous action. One potentially complements the other, as Luxemburg herself realised. Finally, it is also important to note that spontaneity can mean that the revolutionaries themselves lose control. There is, again, the case of Russia, 1917 and the civil war that followed, with the splintering of the Left leading the revolutionaries themselves to engage one another in a deadly fight for control. There is the Kronstadt rebellion, and the attempted assassination of Lenin himself by a left social revolutionary.

**Conclusion: Luxemburg’s Legacy**

For Bernstein, dialectical materialism comprised “metaphysical speculation” in the final instance. It could not be proven or disproven. Luxemburg’s response to Bernstein comprised a reaffirmation of the dialectic and of the very possibility of grasping totality. Bernstein and Luxemburg contest this ground of “totalising theory” as distinct from “eclecticism”, and an underlying scepticism with regard the limitations of Marxian epistemology. Their negotiation of these underlying theoretical
themes remains important for theorists grappling with the limits of human knowledge, and the imperative of grasping large-scale social and economic phenomena. Even though attempts to grasp totality may be flawed and limited, arguably we need at the least, to strive to grasp increasingly global social and economic phenomena in order to consciously shape them and overcome their contradictions. The common postmodern rejection of meta-narratives simply vacates the field to neo-liberal capitalist ideology. Thereafter, there is the matter of Luxemburg’s defence of the necessity of general capitalist collapse. Luxemburg’s thesis is borne out in part by history, and in part is refuted by it, and this may qualify the extent to which her unmodified work remains a valuable legacy. Therefore, we will consider the extent and nature of that legacy by considering its applicability in the decades following her passing.

The First and Second World Wars demonstrated a potential for organised capitalism. Yet, the Great Depression brought capitalism to the precipice, with recovery only coming in the form of the wartime economy, wartime innovation and post-war reconstruction. The post-war period was also marked by the further economic subjugation of the periphery to the core (Wallerstein, 2007, pp 11-12). Core living standards in the capitalist world were maintained, in short, by imperialism, by ruthless exploitation of economic spheres of interest. However, Keynes also changed the debate on necessary capitalist anarchy, developing theories of counter-cyclical demand management; and socialisation of credit, which when applied added to capitalism’s survivability. Rosa Luxemburg’s analysis of capitalism’s more chaotic and destructive driving tendencies remain as a defensible legacy, warning as to where laissez-faire capitalism can lead.

Relating Luxemburg’s insights to the present day is important in establishing the extent to which her legacies are enduring. Some of those contradictions remain even in the face of attempts at regulation, not least of all periodic destruction of existing capital brought on by overproduction (often in the context of speculation), and the imperialist impulse with great powers striving violently to shape the world economic order and various spheres of influence in their own interest. Luxemburg was vindicated in her analysis whereby the extension of the world market via credit simply globalized the economic cycle with its periodic crises.

While periodic bursts of innovation enhance capitalist productivity (and the internet has expanded the world market once more), that world market is again being pressed to its limits. And it is maintained only by externalisation and hyper-exploitation of the global economic periphery. Further, rising powers such as China will increasingly demand their portion of global trade and their position in the global economic order. In the advanced capitalist countries, meanwhile, the rate of exploitation has been intensifying for decades with an ever-declining wage share and also greater labour intensity (hours, conditions, length of the working lifetime, etc.) and corporate welfare (redistribution in favour of capital with cuts in the social wage and welfare;
privatisation; user pays; restructure of the tax system; and decline of public infrastructure and services, etc.).

Nonetheless, amelioration remains possible through the partial realisation of socialist principles – natural and strategic monopolies reducing cost structures across entire economies; other strategic public sector interventions providing for all on the basis of need while negating collusive practices; Keynesian counter-cyclical demand management stepping into the breach in times of panic, crisis and disinvestment, sometimes brought on by overproduction. Imaginably these could still comprise stepping stones to a different social and economic order.

The following may be concluded from an examination of conflicting themes of adaptation and evolution/convulsion, crisis and a presumptions of a ruptural revolutionary break: While with Bernstein we might hope such a socialist transformation could possibly occur via peaceful evolution and adaptation, the reality has been capitalist adaptation only in the context of periodic and violent economic and political convulsions. Contra-Luxemburg capitalism survived and adapted, and contra to Bernstein’s hopes, this has involved a terrible human toll.

Despite Luxemburg’s warnings, capitalism did survive. For her there was no resolution until the capitalists were expropriated, the system of wage labour brought to an end (Kolakowski, pp 443-446). However, later historical examples show that under favourable economic conditions the working class and other social interests can make real gains through reform. The Nordics especially demonstrate this – given the longevity and resilience of their welfare states, though the defeat of the Meidner wage-earner funds demonstrates that even in Sweden expropriation could only go so far without dogged resistance.

Nevertheless, there is a defensible legacy here, from both Bernstein’s Evolutionary Socialism and Luxemburg’s Reform or Revolution and it remains with us today. There is more than a stark choice between reform and revolution, or between ideals and science. Whether one calls it slow revolution or something else, an approach is possible based both on ideals and objective class struggle, class interest, and verifiable capitalist contradictions. Luxemburg’s analysis of the underlying mechanics and tendencies inherent in capitalism provided a remedy for Bernstein’s over-optimism regarding capitalist adaptability. Her dialectical rendition of the tendency towards monopoly, and the weaker counter-tendency of new capital in emerging branches of industry is especially nuanced, as is her appreciation that crisis itself is inherent in the irresistible inner logic of capitalism.
Chapter Five: Karl Kautsky—The Development of ‘Orthodoxy’ and ‘Revolutionary Centrism’

Chapter Five principally concerns the years 1907 to 1914, and with a backwards glance at earlier works by Karl Kautsky in order to consider Kautsky’s thought, focusing on his The Road to Power (1909), The Erfurt Programme (1891) and other important texts. The chapter first provides an overview of Kautsky’s politics, his perspectives on revolution, materialism, determinism, will and free will, and cross-class alliances, and a brief account of his personal and intellectual origins. Finally, the early Kautskyean Marxist orthodoxy is explored in the context of The Erfurt Programme (as distributed in 1892), the first German social-democratic platform, and that sought to establish a purely Marxist interpretation of capitalism and socialist transition.

To clarify, Kautsky’s perspective could not reasonably be considered a ‘Third Way’ or ‘Third Road’ in any sense before 1914. Indeed his perspective comprised the ‘Second Way orthodoxy’ of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, the perspective he developed during that time, of Marxist orthodoxy and then Marxist Centrism was later to be effectively recast as a ‘third road’ with the rise of Bolshevism – which arguably comprised the dominant revolutionary/socialist discourse beginning from 1917. Yet, the doctrines of orthodoxy and Centrism had been developed during their ‘heyday’ of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. So, to understand the perspectives of orthodox and Centrist Marxist radical social democracy it is necessary to look back, to consider the texts of ‘classical Marxism’ whose status was radically altered as a consequence of the World War, ascendant Bolshevism and the branding of Kautsky by Lenin as a ‘Renegade’. It is important to engage with those texts as contributing to a ‘Kautskyan Third Road’ from 1914 onwards, even though written in preceding decades.

To the end of engaging with Kautsky’s theoretical legacy, consideration of his important and most radical work The Road to Power is warranted, as well as aspects of his other works, The Social Revolution and On the Morrow of the Social Revolution. Here will be explored a number of tensions:
• Kautsky’s insistence on the need for both political and social revolution;
• Kautsky’s idea of open and wilful working-class organisation on a massive scale providing the context for great (revolutionary) convulsions and higher forms of the class war, as opposed to conspiratorial or vanguardist approaches to revolution such as Bolshevism, Blanquism; and also in contrast with Luxemburgian notions of ‘spontaneity’;
• Kautsky’s emphasis on maturing material circumstances as opposed to Bolshevist voluntarism, but with these circumstances necessarily intensifying class struggle rather than leading to conciliation, and capitalism bound to break down rather than adapt;
• Kautsky’s emphasis on political and social revolution as opposed to purely trade-union methods, with social-democratic and class consciousness seen as necessary for the working class to fulfil its historic mission;
• Kautsky’s position of neither revolution not legality at any price, as opposed to pure reformism on one hand, and as Beilharz names it, ‘Faustian pacts’ (Beilharz, 1994, pp 60, 63);
• Kautsky’s appreciation of the potential for state violence as opposed to naïve liberal suppositions of a neutral state; and
• Kautsky’s speculation as to the concrete form transition could take immediately in the wake of revolution relevant to the tension between scientific socialism and utopianism.

These factors establish the Kautskyan Third Road in contrast with the Bolshevism which came to eclipse it as the dominant Second Way. They establish Centrism and orthodoxy as distinct positions from Bolshevism. That is, positions that emphasise revolution (as peaceful as possible), materialism, stage-based social change and socialist ‘necessity’. Crucially, the Kautskyan approach avoids the kind of ‘extreme ends and means calculations’ that tore the nexus between socialism, liberty and democracy (Steger, originally describing Bernstein’s disposition). These tensions epitomise the character of the Kautskyan Third Road in contrast with Bolshevism.

Those seeing themselves as the successors to the Bolshevik tradition are wont to dismiss Karl Kautsky as a renegade for his critique of the Bolsheviks and his apparent centrism on the question of revolution. Given his demonization following Lenin’s withering *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, Karl Kautsky has been seen by many on the Left as “a purely theoretical figure”’, even as an “anti-hero” (Salvadori, p 9). Indeed, that very centrism which Kautsky adopted makes him interesting to us today. For his critics Kautsky’s position developed into a rhetorical homage to revolution combined with, in effect, reformism. Yet, a closer inspection of Kautsky reveals a thinker still committed to qualitative political and economic change, and a thinker who retained the conviction that capitalism’s contradictions could not be overcome from within capitalism (Steenson, p 78).
Massimo Salvadori in particular rejects accusations that Kautsky was responsible for integration of social democracy into capitalism. Rather Salvadori argues that under conditions of a “powerful and conservative state apparatus, based on an alliance of aristocratic militarism and elite bureaucracy, and an unprecedented industrial development dominated by a brutal finance capital”; the ‘the real “motor force” of integration was the trade union movement’ (Salvadori, pp 18-19). While the trade-union movement continued to expand in Germany, reaching 887,698 members in 1903 and 1,500,000 members in 1905, the bourgeoisie managed to convince many unionists to narrow their focus to ‘their own “corporate interests”’, for example, wage struggles. The rise of economism within the union movement, as well as the rise of a self-interested “labour aristocracy” saw the industrial wing of the social-democratic movement, where the real power of industrial leverage existed, increasingly divorced from the political wing. Hence, while the SPD was radicalised in response to the 1905 Russian Revolution, with many calling for a general strike to achieve universal suffrage and free association, the unions by and large rejected this. Their leadership moved motions against the use of the mass strike as a strategy against the reaction, or to defend or extend democratic and liberal rights. Prior victories against revisionism proved chimerical (Salvadori, pp 73-75, 91-95, 109-113).

Much of the substance of Kautsky’s position was presented in 1909 with *The Road to Power*. Therein Kautsky developed his theories on revolution, free will and the will to live, revisionism, and the role of the trade unions. Already Kautsky was in conflict with the Bolsheviks with regards his scepticism concerning the prospects for revolution in Russia. *The Road to Power* contains much of the substance of the later revolutionary centrist Third Road, even though Kautsky was later to make additional breaks. This was a transitional time for social democracy more broadly. Kautsky’s authority within the SPD was under sustained attack. Indeed, the SPD executive went so far as to attempt to block the publishing of *The Road to Power* as it was deemed too radical.

Kautsky negotiates a number of oppositions in *The Road to Power* through which he develops his own distinctive Third Road. This position was not seen to be such in 1909. However, looking back from after rise to hegemony by Bolshevism after 1917, revolutionary centrism came to be distinct from that emerging dominant revolutionary discourse. In many ways, Kautsky’s centrism was close to Austro-Marxism. Kautsky claims the mantle of revolutionary struggle and, yet, is uncomfortable with – as Gramsci was later to refer to it – “wars of movement” and sees change more likely to come through peaceful mass action as opposed to violent insurgency, though he does suggest the possibility of a “catalytic event” such as a famine or war (Steenson, p 68).

Importantly, parliamentarianism based on existing German political institutions was not sufficient. A political revolution was necessary to democratise the executive wing of government. Until such a time the German Reichstag was limited to control of taxation, and the amendment or rejection of legislative proposals. Without control of
the executive wing of government, the armed forces themselves were not democratically accountable (and the example of Chile in 1973 also shows that even under conditions of outwardly liberal democracy, still the armed forces can prove unreliable). This was the final trump card of imperial German absolutism (Joll, p 59).

Another theme Kautsky addresses is that of deliberate, wilful organisation as opposed to spontaneity, bringing him in to opposition with the perspective of Luxemburg. Further, Kautsky addresses the issue of voluntarism versus materialism and determinism, deciding firmly in favour of the materialist determinist camp. These themes then flow on to questions of teleology versus contingency, a prominent factor here being Kautsky’s materialist/determinist/teleological outlook. Here he is at odds with some Austro-Marxists such as Max Adler.

Kautsky leaves an important legacy for the socialist movement. Today his optimism may seem misplaced but nonetheless he provides a genuinely revolutionary perspective, and one that avoids the trappings of extreme voluntarism. At the same time, Kautsky was correct to emphasize the self-belief of the working class in its own strength and in the just nature of its cause. While the extremes of both voluntarism and determinism are best avoided, Kautsky provides a vision of social change through massive working-class organisation and discipline, and potentially over decades of struggle, which appears relevant for social democracy and the organised working class today.

The Development of Kautsky’s thought

Kautsky’s biographer Gary Steenson observes that the young Kautsky was influenced, like many others, by the rising trends of scientific positivism and materialism, and the critique of religion. Kautsky was an early enthusiast for Darwin, which would appear in keeping with his usual characterisation as having “scientific” or “deterministic” leanings (Steenson, pp 19-24, 27). Indeed, Kautsky was influenced by Ernst Haeckel, a writer who contended that:

> the soul of man, just as the soul of animals, is a purely mechanical activity … that ... is transmitted by inheritance … just as every other quality of the body is materially transmitted by propagation. (Haekel cited in Steenson, pp 24-26)

Here Kautsky stood in opposition to the Cartesian dualism, which assumes transcendent properties of spirit and mind (Steenson, p 27).

Kautsky’s first overtly Marxist article from 1878 rejects the notion that the end of private property – the end of struggle between human beings as natural law – would mean “the decline of humanity” (Seidlitz). Instead, Kautsky insisted: “Instinctive solidarity rules as a weapon in the struggle for existence in society”, and this was
often on the basis of ideals and group identity and interest, not merely personal material interest. However, Kautsky also thought that capitalism destroys these social bonds, turning people against each other (Steenson, pp 31-32). For Steenson, there was an apparent contradiction in Kautsky’s thought, between assumptions of class struggle and natural co-operation (Steenson, pp 65-66).

In ‘The Class Struggle’ (Erfurt Programme) Kautsky contends that history is not caused by “ideas” but “as Marx and Engels showed”, “by an economic development which progresses irresistibly, obedient to certain underlying laws”. This is based on “new wants among men which compel them to reflect upon their social condition”. This change thus is dependent on human consciousness; “without ideas, there is no progress”. Nonetheless “the first impulse” derives “from economic conditions”. This in itself seems to suggest limited powers of the human imagination to extend beyond existing conditions and their apparent potential (Kautsky, 1971, p 119). It is a position Kautsky develops further in The Road to Power (1909). As Ashton and Vollraft argue, orthodox Marxism suggests the political realm is thus “secondary and derivative” (Ashton and Vollraft, pp 86-87).

Both Kautsky and Bernstein were drawn into the radical (Eisenacher) wing of the movement and became close friends, working together on the socialist journal Die Neue Zeit (‘The New Age’), which emerged from 1883 as the main platform in Germany for orthodox Marxism. Kautsky had been converted to Marxism via “intense study” of Anti-Dühring as the protégé of Engels, making good use of the then-unparalleled resources of the Museum of London. By 1885, his “overt appeals to biological or naturalistic explanations were replaced by an emphasis on historical, social and economic determinants”. By 1887, his Economic Doctrines of Karl Marx was published, providing a lucid account of such concepts as “commodity, profit, surplus value, socially necessary labour, and constant and variable capital” (Steenson, pp 41, 63, 66-67). Kautsky was to emerge, and for many decades, as Marxism’s most authoritative proponent.

However, to understand how Kautsky’s position becomes a Third Road entails consideration of the history of his thought and commentary from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is also necessary to trace the decline of orthodoxy and Centrism as well as the rise of ‘pragmatic’ right-wing revisionism, and clarify how, against this backdrop, ‘orthodoxy’ and ‘Centrism’ lost their status as the perspectives of the relative ‘Second Way’ of radical Marxist social democracy. In this chapter the concern is with the content of ‘orthodoxy’ and ‘Centrism’ (Chapter Seven concerns the catastrophe of World War, radical social democratic collapse, and the subsequent rise of Bolshevism.). As there is a consistency between the early Kautsky and the late Kautsky, an analysis of his early works is relevant in the context of its later relegation as a ‘Third Road’ or ‘Third Way’ as well.
**Erfurt and Onwards**

By 1891, Kautsky was seen to be in such an authoritative position that he was asked to write the theoretical section of the landmark SPD party programme of that year (‘The Erfurt Programme’). Also published as ‘The Class Struggle’ it was distributed in 1892 and comprised a statement of Marxist orthodoxy, and, so, a rejection of the prior accommodation with the Lassalleans. ‘The Erfurt Programme’ begins with an assertion of the passing of small production and the process of proletarianisation and class bifurcation and class struggle seen to be inherent in capitalism. Kautsky explains how these forces are accompanied by centralization and monopolisation in production, and the immiseration and alienation experienced by the working class (Kautsky, 1971, pp 7-9). Here, the content of the emerging orthodox Marxism related to such maxims as overproduction, cyclical crises, the falling rate of profit, overall class bifurcation, and the analytical method of dialectical/historical materialism.

Notably, it is in the methods of struggle that the Kautskyan Third Road is evident here. Kautsky is an internationalist, contending that the proletariat is driven to adopt international forms of organisation, consciousness and solidarity, in recognition of the “development of world-commerce and production for the world market” (Kautsky, 1971, pp 159-160). This early globalization had the irony of encouraging at the same time global interdependence, but also the rivalries that would lead to protectionism, imperialism, and catastrophic war.

In the spirit of Marx, and as opposed to the method of political conspiracy, Kautsky proposes an open struggle for suffrage, free association, free assembly and free speech. Therefore, Kautsky adopts parliamentarianism as a strategy at the same time as observing its limitations. So, at the same time, Kautsky was sceptical of the possibility of “laying ahold of the existing state machinery” as Lenin was later to frame the argument (Kautsky, 1971, pp 185-186). Through the late 1890s and into the early 1900s (the time of the revisionist controversy), as opposed to Bernstein Kautsky fought against cross-class alliances and class compromises on the basis of a people’s party (with other “oppressed layers” such as the liberal bourgeoisie, petty-bourgeoisie and peasantry). He was faithful to the idea that history was on the side of the proletariat, and to its increasing organisation and consciousness (Salvadori, pp 62-67).

Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau summarise ‘The Class Struggle’ as “a typical Kautskian text which puts forward an indissociable unity of history, theory and strategy”. Further elaborating, they contend: “The paradigm is simple, in a primary and literal sense that Kautsky quite explicitly presents a theory of the increasing simplification of the social structure and the antagonisms within it”. Hence, they see his view of the state as one of “the most crass instrumentalism”. Further, they allege: “Kautsky … simplified the meaning of every social antagonism or element by reducing it to a specific structural location, already fixed by the capitalist mode of
production”. They conclude: “The Class Struggle” is marked by the “internal rationality and intelligibility of a closed paradigm” (Mouffe and Laclau, pp 14-15, 16).

Briefly in response, it is notable that for Kautsky theory was a tool for the construction of a new order. His intention from the outset in ‘The Class Struggle’ was to make Marxism intelligible to a mass audience. With regard the state, pure instrumentalism must be rejected in that the state itself is marked by internal contradiction (yet state neutrality is a false ideology also; and there are some levels at which an instrumentalist thesis conforms to reality). Further, Kautsky’s later idea of an “energetic shifting of power relations in the state”, while vague tends to suggest something more than instrumentalism (Kautsky, 1996, pp 16, 71-72).

Laclau and Mouffe observe that: “Here the logic of necessity is not limited by anything: this is what makes “The Class Struggle” a pre-crisis (pre-Revisionism) text.” (Mouffe and Laclau, pp 15-16). Therefore, Marxist orthodoxy was not a simple continuation of earlier nineteenth-century Marxism. It arose in response to the failure of capitalism and the class struggle to proceed in the way that was predicted.

For the early Kautsky (pre-revisionism), “proletarianisation and impoverishment, and simplification” are considered “empirically observable realities in the first two cases, and of a short-term transition in the third”. By the time of writing The Road to Power (1909), Mouffe and Laclau argue, Kautsky had embraced “a new role for theory” in guaranteeing that the historical tendencies perceived by Marxism would “eventually coincide with the type of social articulation proposed by the Marxist paradigm”. Hence the rise of a theoretical Marxist orthodoxy that responded to, and attempted to heal the fragmentation of the working class (that fragmentation being the consequence of labour aristocracy, division between organised and unorganised workers, and ‘Catholic “church populism”’). This might also explain the constant re-emphasis on the category of necessity (guaranteed by Marxist science) upon which Kautsky and other Marxists had staked so much. Therefore there was an emphasis on the end objective and “the subordination of economic struggle to political struggle, and thus of the trade unions to the party”. As Mouffe and Laclau explain, the resulting presumption of “a privileged role for intellectuals” influenced Lenin (Mouffe and Laclau, pp 15-20).

Mouffe and Laclau further turn to Labriola as a response to Kautsky’s “simple” theorization. In short, Labriola argued for “morphological” “historical laws”; that is, “their area of validity was restricted to certain fundamental tendencies”. Mouffe and Laclau conclude that,

since the life of society is ever-more complex than the morphological categories of Marxist discourse – and this complexity was Labriola’s starting point – the
only possible consequence is that theory becomes an increasingly irrelevant tool for the understanding of concrete social processes. (Mouffe and Laclau, P 26)

They write of Marxism and of Kautsky in particular that, “the concrete is reduced to the abstract”, with politics conceived as a “superstructure” and “diverse subject positions … reduced to manifestations of a single position” (i.e., class). Further, “the sense of the present is revealed through its location in an a priori succession of stages” (Mouffe and Laclau, pp 21-22).

In response, however, theory usually needs simplification in order to be useful. That does not mean it does not grasp something real, even if in a reduced and simplified form. The theory of class struggle cannot fully grasp totality as totality is too complex. Nonetheless ‘the total ensemble of social relations’ is of course real. While we should confront our limitations, attempting to think at this level has a practical usefulness. If structure and agency condition each other, this allows for systems and sub-systems that involve their own internal logics, but also impact upon one another. Allowing for agency, there is also the potential for collective free-will mobilisation to intervene in this process and to alter the outcomes.

Marxism grasped much of the internal logic of capitalism, even though at first it did not perceive the ways in which capitalism could adapt. Also, there are identities and forms of oppression that exist externally to the logic of capitalism, or at least in a partially external fashion, (i.e., their nature cannot be distilled purely as the consequences of capitalism) and Mouffe and Laclau are right to call into question the constant privileging of class above all else. Yet, today the opposite is the case. Class struggle and socialism are relegated to a ‘too-hard’ basket.

Kautsky found himself fighting on two fronts against both revisionism and the radical social-democratic Left led by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. While Kautsky won these debates overwhelmingly in purely formal terms, the reality of SPD day-to-day operations was increasingly one of reformism. Steenson notes the warning given to Kautsky by Victor Adler, that old positions were increasingly relegated to the status of mere “slogans” (Steenson, pp 116-123).

**Kautsky’s The Road to Power (1909)**

In the introduction to the 1996 edition of *The Road to Power* there appears a narrative by Karl Kautskys grandson, John H. Kautsky, emphasizing Karl Kautsky’s preference for the parliamentary road. He produces an apparently unequivocal statement by Karl Kautsky in a letter to Bernstein:

I completely agree with you that in England the road to the development of a socialist society is open without a revolution … Things are different in
Germany; political revolution is needed to get where the English are (Kautsky cited in J.H. Kautsky, p x).

However, elsewhere Karl Kautsky appears to take a different line than one of naïve liberal parliamentarianism. Kautsky elaborated in an important pamphlet, *The Social Revolution* (1903):

I will openly confess that I, too, formerly had laid great hopes on England … [and that] Socialism would proceed not by means of a social revolution, but peacefully by a series of progressive concessions to the proletariat on the part of the ruling class … [But the] experience of the last few years has destroyed my hope for England, too. (Kautsky, 1903, p 31)

Thus while Kautsky is in favour of reforms, he sees himself as a revolutionary in terms of the reformist/revolutionary divide. Important, though, is the meaning of revolution for Kautsky. Certainly, in *The Road to Power* he rejects the characterisation of revolution as simply comprising violent social change. On the other hand he does pose the question of transforming the state so it is no longer “an instrument of class rule” (i.e., he is in favour of political revolution). He also proposes “a change in the mode of production”, that is, not mere tinkering around the edges but the forceful suppression of capitalist contradictions with the transition to a socialist economy and society (Kautsky, 1996, p 1).

Kautsky admitted that he was uncertain whether the revolution he presumes as a matter of necessity will be violent, or whether “they will be fought exclusively with the means of economic, legislative, and moral pressure”. The overwhelming nature of modern military power had him doubting the efficacy of a path of violence, but the supposition of strategies involving economic pressure such as mass strike action placed him beyond the boundaries of mere bourgeois, liberal-democratic channels (Kautsky, 1996, p 35).

As Gary Steenson relates in his biographical work on Kautsky, the so-called “Red Pope” held that social democracy was revolutionary ‘not because it relied on violence, but because it held that the “social question” could not be solved within existing society’ (Steenson, p 78; this author’s emphasis). Again, this establishes the Kautskyan approach a socialist (and Marxist) Third Road rather than a Third Way. However, as with Luxemburg his position could alternatively be construed as a Third Way compared with Stalinism later on; because for all intents and purposes, Stalin abandoned communism in the authentic Marxist sense.

Importantly, though, for Kautsky the conquest of democratic institutions need not mean the end of the proletariat as a revolutionary force. Rejecting interpretations of democracy as a ‘safety valve’ through which revolutionary energies are diverted and dissipated, he instead insists that: “Democracy cannot eliminate the … antagonisms of
However, Kautsky does view democratic institutions as providing a measure of the balance of class forces, preventing “premature” and “futile attempts at revolution”. By Kautsky’s reckoning, therefore, the bourgeoisie will not refuse concessions it knows it is no longer strong enough to refuse. The consequence of this was supposedly a more “tranquil” and “boring” struggle than the spectacular revolutionary upheavals of the liberal bourgeoisie, but one that “requires … fewer sacrifices” (Kautsky, 1996, p 36).

Also characteristic of Kautsky is his preference for open organisation and open class struggle on a massive scale. This was to be driven in part by the irresistible growth of the proletariat, which was swiftly becoming the dominant class in Germany in terms of numbers, and throughout Europe was increasingly organised in trade unions and social-democratic parties. The presumption, here, was that in preceding years and perhaps prior decades, (for instance, he argued this in 1909 at the time of writing ‘The Road to Power’) would provide a preparatory phase culminating where the proletariat, has drawn from the existing governmental framework as much strength as could be drawn from it, when a transformation of this framework has become a condition for its further advancement. (Kautsky, 1996, pp xvii, 42, 47-51, 59)

Kautsky’s approach thus could be well-described as a process of political and economic siege against capitalism and absolutism, consolidating one stronghold after another through overwhelming organisation. This was to continue until the process arrived at a critical mass with effective political revolution and a shift within the state, from one of medium for capitalist rule to one of proletarian transitional rule. In his own words Kautsky discerned between “the strategy of annihilation and the strategy of attrition”, “which corresponded to two different phases of a relationship of forces and could not be abstractly counter-posed” (Kautsky in Salvadori, p 140). Though Kautsky did not completely rule out a strategy of annihilation under the right circumstances, for example,

if the enemy became extremely weak or if it threatened the freedom of action already won by the proletariat and therewith its possibilities of political and organisational development. (Salvadori, pp 140-141)

At the same time he did little to prepare for that contingency.

Mouffe and Laclau contend that Kautsky’s apparently ‘radical’ position is in fact ‘conservative’ as “his radicalism relied on a process which did not require political initiatives, [and so] it could only lead to quietism and waiting”. “Propaganda and organisation were … in fact the only … tasks of the party” (Mouffe and Laclau, p 22). Yet, regardless of the growth in trade unions Kautsky was also adamant that trade-
union methods alone were not sufficient. While unions could wage defensive struggles against “complete pauperisation”, going onto a political footing for instance, struggling for the suffrage in the context of mass strike action could possibly comprise a more fruitful strategy (Kautsky, 1996, p 67). Further, political action was also crucial to prevent the winding back of industrial liberties.

Kautsky’s fears about the limits of purely trade-union methods were to be used as a wedge against him by right-wing trade-union leaders. The integrating power of nationalism neutralised the German trade unions as a source of resistance to world war in 1914 (Salvadori, pp 124-125, 134-136). Mouffe and Laclau depict industrial successes as leading to greater autonomy of the German trade unions from the SPD, leading to a “steady tension” where unity could only be achieved via “unstable and complex forms of rearticulation”. Hence, “it became ever-more difficult to reduce social relations to structural moments internal to those categories”. As they conclude,

from then on, the problem of Marxism has been to think those discontinuities and, at the same time, to find forms reconstituting the unity of scattered and heterogeneous elements. (Mouffe and Laclau, pp 18, 25)

Kautsky, rejecting the methods of the anarchists whose propaganda of the deed had in the past prompted sweeping repression of the Left, decrees in a manner typical of his centrism, that:

We are neither men of legality at any price, nor are we revolutionaries at any price. We know that we cannot create historical situations as we would like to have them, that our tactics must be adapted to them. (Kautsky, 1996, p 42)

His vision of powerful, disciplined mass organisations is at odds with Luxemburg’s vision of relative working-class spontaneity where, instead, the revolutionary cadres found themselves in a position of constant adaptation to proletarian initiative. These developments as foreseen by Kautsky also required the fullest development of social-democratic and class consciousness on the part of the proletariat. A consequence of this is that Kautsky is also at odds with Luxemburg on the theme of the possibility of an early socialist revolution, even in Russia. He is even critical of Marx and Engels, who, he argues, expected revolution “too soon” (Kautsky, 1996, pp 1-2).

By contrast, the radical Marxist theoretician Anton Pannekoek, writing in 1910, believed that revolution would be achieved with mass assemblies, protests, but ultimately and most effectively, via mass strike action. Rather than with real workers’ power at the grass roots, Pannekoek believed the parliamentary road to be one of “impotence”. Old gains could only be held and new gains conquered through struggle (Salvadori, pp 153-155). As Salvadori explains:
In a phase of accelerating workers’ power, organisation and consciousness [become] two internal movements of the same dynamic of the movement in struggle, dialectically related in an ascending spiral. (Salvadori, p 157)

This bears a close resemblance to the ideas of Rosa Luxemburg as she explained in *The Mass Strike*, as discussed in Chapter Four. Yet, as against the optimism of Luxemburg and Pannekoek, Kautsky rejected spontaneism, fearing that: “The indiscriminate use of struggle led not to ever-greater strength but to exhaustion and decomposition” (and especially if one underestimated one’s adversary) (Salvadori, p 159). Kautsky was also wary of Pannekoek’s prescriptions to smash the state power, and long before Lenin’s *The State and Revolution*, given enduring “technical problems of social management” (Salvadori, pp 159-162).

A useful indication of the importance Kautsky placed on class consciousness and social-democratic consciousness in the methodical, deliberate and organised application of revolutionary proletarian will can be found in *The Road to Power*:

> Only the recognition and understanding of the social process, of its tendencies and goals, can … concentrate the forces of the proletariat and join them together in large organisations that are united by great goals, and that methodically subordinate individual actions and actions of the moment to enduring class interests, which for their part, subserve the whole social development. … Theory … increases not only the proletariat’s effective strength, but also its belief in its strength. And that is no less necessary. (Kautsky, 1996, p 28)

Therein Kautsky also rejected revisionist and liberal suggestions of a future social peace based upon the organisation of the social classes and reconciliation. While Kautsky acknowledged that concentration of capital prepares the way for socialism, this does not mean socialism will be achieved imperceptibly without struggle.

Kautsky observed the growth of trade unions and workers’ co-operatives “[imposing] limits on the absolutism of employers”, as well as gains via “representative bodies” (Kautsky, 1996, pp 16-18, 71-72). Yet, earlier in his 1903 work *The Social Revolution* he had also observed that the re-investment of dividends by co-operatives could not keep pace with the accumulation of private capital; nor had the municipalities the tax levers to sustain social investments. Further, he had observed advancements in employer organisation and monopolisation providing a match for working-class organisation, and with state sanctions against industrial rights and liberties. Finally, in the context of partial suffrage at best, and even among remnants of monarchical absolutism, the ‘ruling class’ “condemn[ed] the Parliaments … to fruitlessness” (Kautsky, 1903, pp 33-35, 39).

Despite all this, Kautsky maintained that democratic processes, rights and institutions were like “what light and air are [to] the organism; without them it cannot develop its
strength”. Kautsky was confident that with the political (i.e., democratic) revolution there was the prospect of “higher forms of the class war”, “a fight of organised, enlightened masses, steady and deliberate” (Kautsky, 1903, pp 39-40).

Instead, Kautsky poses the scenario whereby:

the antagonism between capital and labour, which began as an antagonism between a number of individuals constituting a small minority within the state, is now growing into a struggle of gigantic, tight-knit organisations, which condition the whole life of society and state. Thus growing into socialism means growing into great struggles that will convulse the entire political system … [that] can end only with the defeat and expropriation of the capitalist class. (Kautsky, 1996, pp 16-18)

Indeed, as Salvadori notes: “Kautsky had no fear that democracy could become a means of integrating the proletariat into the ruling system since” (in Kautsky’s words) it “could not abolish the class contradictions of capitalist society and prevent their necessary result” (Salvadori, p 41). Decades later, that is exactly how events unfolded. Contributing factors included relative abundance and the rise of post-industrial conditions as well as a deceptive and sometimes-subtle, omnipresent variant of bourgeois liberal democratic ideology. The point of all this is simply that mass organisation and even mass social-democratic consciousness on their own are not necessarily sufficient, though certainly they are helpful, and worth working for. For instance, social democracy was a state within a state in Germany according to Bronner, but without socialist and internationalist consciousness in the labour movement, German social democracy was powerless in the face of world war and the imperial German state (Bronner, p 584). Yet by contrast the Meidner wage-earner fund struggle in Sweden during the 1970s and 1980s was very close to successful, and suggestive of the potential of social democracy in alliance with a truly radicalised and politicised labour movement.

In *The Road to Power* Kautsky further elaborates his understanding of revolution. He argues the need for a “political revolution”; that is, not just an accumulation of reforms within the framework of the existing constitutional order but “an energetic shifting of power relations in the state”; this requiring “a great, decisive struggle” (Kautsky, 1996, p 16). Elsewhere he argues for the need of “change … [in] the relations of political power and of political institutions” whereby “[The] proletariat must grow immensely” and through democracy attain “a dominant position in the state” (Kautsky, 1996, pp 71-72). Notably, achieving “a dominant position in the state” is a far more ambitious goal than a mere parliamentary majority. Kautsky is not specific regarding how this is supposed to occur, however.

For Kautsky the political revolution was a necessary prerequisite to the achievement of socialism, but the social revolution was also protracted and deep in his grand
schema, perhaps more so than the political revolution. (Bronner, pp 585-586). Bronner makes the penetrating observation that Kautsky does not provide a total viewpoint bringing together the political and social revolution: “transition demands and immediate needs, nationalism and internationalism … reform and revolution”. Further, Kautsky’s and Bernstein’s perspectives are more defensive than the offensive posture of Luxemburg.

Kautsky, following Marx, elaborates on the political revolution as,

the more or less rapid transformation of the vast juridical and political superstructure of society which results from the transformation of its economic foundations’.

In other words, a new socialist constitution, requires a political and economic break. However, he also insists that this need not mean chaos or violence – barricades or guillotines. (Kautsky, 1902, p 1). Indeed, in view of modern military firepower: “Militarism can only be overcome through the military themselves proving untrustworthy, not through their being defeated by the revolted people” (as in Russia 1917, and to a degree 1905) (Kautsky, 1902, p 43).

Gary Steenson observes that as “Kaiser Wilhelm delighted in pointing out, if he ordered the army to shoot all the Reichstag representatives, it would”. This was the reality in Germany at the time, and similarly even in some ostensibly democratic regimes thereafter (For example, Chile in 1973) (Steenson pp 118-119). The question of the state, taken for granted by Western liberals for so long, perhaps ought not be taken for granted. However, Leninist assumptions are equally questionable: the reality being closer, perhaps, to Poulantzas’s conception of the state as “a contested field” (Poulantzas, pp 138-140).

In the face of the superfluity of the bourgeoisie which increasingly played no direct role in production but delegated these functions, Kautsky contends that “the relationship between the wage worker and the capitalist changes more and more into a mere power relationship, maintained by the power of the state” (Kautsky, 1996, pp 28-29). The more glaring these power relations became, meanwhile, and the more blatant the repression, the more antagonistic the class relations would become, and the more radical and decisive the ultimate revolutionary break. These antagonisms were further exacerbated by distributive injustices, for instance the decline of the wage share of the economy in Britain from 47 per cent to 43.5 per cent from 1860 to 1891 (Kautsky, 1902, pp 14, 17-18). Discontent would gradually swell in relation to capitalist contradictions and injustices – unemployment, poverty, war, intense exploitation, alienation involving the ruination of body and mind; cyclical crises and general economic collapse (Steenson, p 78; Kautsky, 1971, pp 71-79).
Kautsky singled out the political strike as potentially a very effective weapon of struggle at the disposal of the organised working class. Even this, he insisted, must be used strategically as capitalism would not collapse as the consequence of a single blow via the mass strike; and the proletariat itself would suffer in the process (Kautsky, 1902, p 44).

Proletarian self-belief and self-awareness was also vital. Thus he emphasizes the importance of “May Day celebrations”, “electoral campaigns”, and “struggles for the suffrage” in raising awareness (Kautsky, 1996, pp 28-29). For Kautsky such is the preparation for a day of reckoning that,

the strength of a class that has been handed down from the past continues to be operative on both sides for a long time until a test of strength takes place, for example, a war, that reveals all the weakness of the ruling class. Now the dominated class suddenly becomes aware of its strength, the point is reached when a revolution, a sudden collapse, occurs. (Kautsky, 1996, p 28)

Probably fearing the kind of bourgeois reaction outlined by Marx in ‘The Eighteenth Brumaire’, Kautsky (like Bernstein) is eager to assert that revolution would actually prevent chaos, and insofar as the revolution would prove disruptive Kautsky is eager to depict it as inevitable; a vehicle not chosen by the Social Democrats but rendered necessary by history. Thus, the party would not “organise the revolution” but “organise for the revolution” (Steenosn, p 78).

**Will and Free Will**

Another theme that Kautsky regularly revisited in his career as a Marxist scholar was that of free will or the tension between determinism and voluntarism. He, like Luxemburg, saw socialism as a matter of necessity. The revisionist German trade-union leader, Friedrich Naumann had criticised the prospects of revolution as being unnecessarily destructive, employing the supposition of free will to deny the need for a ruptural break. Kautsky’s response was telling:

[The] theory of peaceful “growth into” socialism has a gaping hole, which is to be plugged up by the enormous creative power of the living human personality and its free will. … If Naumann is right that the will is free and “shapes things this way or that”; then it is absolutely incomprehensible what guarantee we have that we are growing into socialism and not into something else. … Then it is altogether impossible to recognise any direction of social development; then no social scientific knowledge is possible. (Kautsky, 1996, p 21)

We may well question Kautsky’s assumption that the very possibility of any social science hinges upon materialism/determinism/teleology. To support his arguments
Kautsky theorizes the existence of human will and of the importance of human personality, even if not free human will. Presuming the same assumption as Marx, he refutes the criticism of Marxism that it supposes the processes of economic development to be automatic, “without willing human individuals” (Kautsky, 1996, p 22).

By contrast, the human will is essential for Kautsky, comprising a “determinate volition” which can be reduced ultimately to “the will to live”, which “underlies all economy” (Kautsky, 1996, p 22). Here there is only the illusion of free will because of differences of sense perception, contextual interpretation and consciousness. Thus, consciousness guides the will, and the forms of the latter are dependent on the manner in which and the degree to which consciousness recognises the living conditions. (Kautsky, 1996, p 26)

Depending on life circumstances, education – a host of factors – people perceive the world in different ways.

The invention of new technology, he says, also

creates the possibility of living better than before, of obtaining more abundant food, more leisure, more safety, or, finally, satisfying new needs and desires that until then were unknown.

Further, “The more technology is developed, the more does the will to live become the will to live better” (Kautsky, 1996, p 24). Finding expression in the social context it is this will to live, which Kautsky presumes as the driving force behind capitalist exploitation, and behind the resistance to that exploitation. Therefore:

Class antagonisms are antagonisms of volition … [The] workers’ will to live drives [them] to rebel against the capitalists’ will. Hence the class struggle. (Kautsky, 1996, p 25)

By this reckoning, relative abundance can ameliorate the conditions that give rise to the class struggle, thus dissipating revolutionary energies. It is the creation of new needs made possible by advances in health, nutrition, material productivity and culture, which provide foci for evolving human aspiration, but such innovations have not put an end to imperialism and war, or to the subversion of culture and democracy by wealth. Though material satisfaction is an important part of the picture, human aspiration runs deeper than the desire for material abundance.

Kautsky’s assumption of the creation of new needs, therefore – presumably cultural needs, and the need for human dignity – grounded his notion of the ‘will to live’ on broader territory than mere material necessity. However, that is not the problem with
Kautsky’s perspective on free will and necessity. Kautsky as much as Luxemburg had based his entire perspective on the theorized inevitability and necessity of socialist revolution, and as the result of exploitation, bifurcation, immiseration – a choice between socialism or barbarism (Kautsky, 1971, pp 116-119). A consequence of his perspective, however, was that suppositions of voluntarism and contingency threatened the whole theoretical edifice.

Kautsky did not foresee the extent of material abundance that would develop within capitalism but in a way he was right in posing the question as one of socialism or barbarism, as the failure of a liberal and democratic socialism to take root through much of the twentieth century saw two world wars, the Depression and fascism. Regarding free will, Engels’s words are once more instructive,

an endless group of parallelograms of forces … thwarting one another … [where] … what every single man wills is hindered by every other man, and the result of the struggle is something which no one had intended. (Engels, Letter of 1890 cited in Bernstein, n.d., p 11)

And from Marx’s ‘The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte’:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. (Marx and Engels, Vol. I, p 413)

By this reckoning, and according to Marx in particular, the reality is somewhere between hard determinism and radical voluntarism. Certainly, capitalism has its own logic, and until humanity collectively resolves to organise economies on a different basis, that logic is beyond humanity’s ability to thoroughly transform on the basis of individual volition.

**Scientific Socialism meets Utopianism**

Kautsky envisaged the future “social or co-operative production for the satisfaction of the wants of a commonwealth” rather than production of commodities for sale (Kautsky, 1996, pp 95-96). For a time, even under socialism, “distribution” may occur “under forms that are essentially developments of the existing system of wage-payment” (Kautsky, 1996, p 141). As to the ultimate nature of this future socialist order Kautsky was vague but optimistic:

We must not think of the socialist society as something rigid and uniform, but rather as an organism, constantly developing, rich in possibilities of change, an organism that is to develop naturally from increasing the division of labour,
commercial exchange, and the dominance of society by science and art. (Kautsky, 1996, p 141)

He further refutes conservative and economic liberal arguments, that under socialism “everyone will work as little as possible”, and “knowledge, having ceased to be appreciated, will cease to be cultivated”, and that there will be “relapse” to “barbarism”. For Kautsky absolute equality of incomes is not the necessary form of socialism. In any case he also holds that individual economic activity is not based on “remuneration” alone but also “[his] duty, his ambition, his dignity, his pride etc.” (Kautsky, 1996, pp 141-142).

Here Kautsky develops the argument that industrialisation leads to a greater division of labour on a greater scale, making small-scale communism impossible as a general model, while also bringing an end to small production. There is even production for the global market, “production for the whole world”, such that “one must almost question whether the limits of the state are sufficiently inclusive to contain the Cooperative Commonwealth”. However, Kautsky does not suppose such interdependence need pose a problem for the “economic independence” of states so long as nations “produce all that is actually necessary and exchange with another superfluities” (Kautsky, 1996, pp 100-102, 147-148).

Also of note during this period was Kautsky’s opposition to “state socialism” (Staatssozialismus). He had raised this issue much earlier, in the 1890s in his controversy with Von Vollmar, arguing that although nationalisation could serve the proletariat’s interests under conditions of a democratic republic, under the authoritarian German Reich it would serve the interests of the ruling classes (Salvadori, p 42). Yet that term, ‘state socialism’, came to be associated with an indiscriminate stigma against nationalisation as a strategy. This perspective continues to hold sway on much of the Left to this day. However, by Kautsky’s own reckoning, a democratic republic in which the proletariat held sway could utilise nationalisation to further its own interests. Indeed, a diverse array of social-democratic experiences, sometimes with widespread socialisation even in the context of bourgeois liberal democracy tends to suggest more room to move than Kautsky supposed. His hypothesis here stands in contrast to his other assumption of a gradual economic transition.

Thus, somewhat at odds with his usual claims to reject blueprints for the future, Kautsky provided a quite vivid picture of the initial substance of socialist transition. Universal suffrage, freedom of association and expression, separation of church and state, abolition of hereditary privilege – all feature in his vision. So, too, does the armament of the people and the abolition of militarism “for the safety of democracy”. Also crucial is the abolition of indirect (i.e., regressive taxation) and its replacement with progressive forms of taxation on income and wealth. In 1903 Kautsky was practical about the immediate prospects of radically extending public education, and
emphasized making education accessible to the proletariat and improving conditions for teachers.

He flags his intention to end unemployment, or if some unemployment persists, to maintain a varied system of social security, removing “the whip of hunger” and markedly improving the bargaining position of the organised working class (Kautsky, *On the Morrow of the Social Revolution*, 1903, pp 3-6, 17-18). As for socialisation, some factories were to become co-operative enterprises; others taken over by state bodies – municipal, regional or national. Monopolies, especially, would be socialised, as with production of raw materials (“mines, forests, iron-works, engineering works”, etc.) and essential infrastructure such as electric lighting, power transmission, and hydro-electric facilities (Kautsky, *On the Morrow of the Social Revolution*, 1903, pp 6-7).

Socialisation of economic ownership, meanwhile, would be a drawn-out process, facilitated perhaps over decades through progressive taxation. Even assuming some form of compensation, Kautsky was optimistic that: “Every further increase of the social wealth would henceforth be for the benefit of society”. However, importantly, Kautsky had anticipated the threat of capital flight, but notes that many industries are captive to domestic markets. It seems he did concede that the consequence that in a global market socialisation carried out by individual nation-states cannot foreseeably be utterly comprehensive (Kautsky, *On the Morrow of the Social Revolution*, 1903, pp 8-10).

Kautsky rejected the organisation of production in a barracks-like fashion – as was to occur for some time in the Soviet Union under war communism and Stalin’s forced industrialisation. Again he opposed both the “hunger whip” and “still less physical compulsion” (Kautsky, *On the Morrow of the Social Revolution*, 1903, p 12). Instead, Kautsky supposed generous wages and better working conditions (including reduced hours) would provide more than enough in the way of positive incentives to ensure the continuance of production (Kautsky, *On the Morrow of the Social Revolution*, 1903, pp 12-13). Productivity, meanwhile, would flow from the elimination of inefficient small producers and the implementation of multiple shifts for the large factories that remained. Planning would achieve the same ends as competition, but more efficiently and quickly. Thereafter, redistribution wages would be higher and hours shorter, and Kautsky also envisages a boost in productivity from satisfied workers. Full employment would also be of benefit to all (Kautsky, 1903, *On the Morrow of the Social Revolution*, pp 18-23).

In short, Kautsky envisaged better economies of scale and greater efficiency through mass production and elimination of wasteful duplication and administration costs, while reducing working hours for individual workers, but better utilising existing means of production through additional shifts. Prophetically, though, Kautsky supposed the threat for socialism would be *underproduction* – the opposite of
overproduction under capitalism. Responding to this very question, Kautsky ventured that:

Steadiness in the production of the means of production will bring with it steadiness in the demand for articles of consumption, which it will then be easily possible to fix statistically without compulsorily regulating the consumption. (Kautsky, On the Morrow of the Social Revolution, 1903, p 27)

To evaluate Kautsky’s enduring legacy we need to consider the importance of historic changes in advanced economies since his time. In light of the historic experience of Soviet communism, Kautsky’s apparent enthusiasm (at times) for extensively centralised and regulated production is to be questioned despite his support for unregulated consumption. Crucially, compared with Kautsky’s time, today are conditions of relative abundance; there is a potential trade-off between conflicting efficiencies of planning and centralization on the one hand, and innovation and responsiveness and choice on the other. Where choice is trivial and, or wasteful, for example in consumption of energy and water and accessing essential communications and transport infrastructure, preaching that very choice seems misguided, or ideological. Further, in the context of environmental sustainability, stopping overproduction is not just desirable to improve material living standards by ending unnecessary overwork – but also to attenuate the impact of overproduction on the environment.

**Economic Freedom? Markets versus Planning**

Writing in 1891 Kautsky asserted that reservations against socialism pertaining to economic freedom were nonsensical given the context of nineteenth-century wage-slavery. Yet there are problems with Kautsky’s view of Marxian production for use (as opposed to production for sale; e.g., use value versus exchange value). As Feher, Heller and Markus were to observe many decades later, blanket central economic planning can comprise a dictatorship over needs, as opposed to independent determination of needs-structures via market mediated consumption. Top-down economic management in Eastern bloc nations could involve similar conditions of alienation as under capitalism (Fehr, Heller, Markus, pp 45-54). Arguably, Kautsky would have abhorred Eastern bloc communism, though market choice is a problem that only arises for most with relative abundance.

Kautsky contended in the late-nineteenth century that the increasing division of labour meant that “producers lost the capacity to comprehend phenomena as organic wholes”. By contrast, he promotes for all humanity:
A harmonious, well-rounded development of physical and mental powers, a deep concern in the problems of nature and society, a philosophical bent of mind, that is, a searching for the highest truth for its own sake.

Once these could be found only “among those classes who remained free from the necessity of toil”, and under modern capitalism even for the middle classes only those aptitudes considered of ‘economic utility’ are thought worthwhile. However, under socialism – including a reduction of the working week – such cultural development might become possible for everyone (Kautsky, 1971, pp 152-153). Hence socialism would provide the way for ameliorating and ultimately overcoming the alienation that resulted from capitalist modernity and its division of labour.

**Conclusion**

Many themes are apparent in Karl Kautsky’s work, from his original orthodoxy to the development of centrisim: Violence/non-violence, reform/revolution, legalism/non-legalism, revisionism/orthodoxy/leftism. Also pertinent are themes of determinism/materialism versus voluntarism/Cartesian dualism; order/chaos; economic planning/spontaneous equilibrium; and revolutionary centrisim versus radicalism on one side, and reformism on the other. While claiming the mantle of revolution in promoting political revolution and qualitative social change, his supposition that social revolution would be gradual suggests sympathy with attempts to bridge the reform-revolution divide. This is akin to the revolutionary reforms for the Eurocommunists or slow revolution for the Austro-Marxists.

Yet, Kautsky denies pure legalism at any cost while at the same time rejecting unnecessary violence. In this respect his position tends towards centrisim. Nonetheless, his insistence on political revolution placed him at odds with Eduard Bernstein, and his emphasis on the transformation of the apparatus of state points to a more radical viewpoint rather than one of caricature, of mechanistic parliamentarianism.

The theme of order versus chaos re-emerges with Kautsky also. The revolution rather than causing chaos, prevents it by ordering economic life. Production for use replaces exchange value; potential underproduction is seen as less of a problem than overproduction in a context where the proletariat reaps the advantage from economic efficiencies, including a fair share of the ‘economic pie’. Indeed, while even under socialism the division of labour cannot simply be overcome – increasing abundance, health and safety provisions, voluntary and democratic economic discipline, and increased free time provide the means of greatly ameliorating alienation – enabling the development of well-rounded personalities through the enjoyment and comprehension of science and art.
Markets remain as a distributive mechanism, but the place for competition is more ambiguous. Kautsky does not anticipate the future importance of competition/innovation in capitalism under modern conditions of abundance but suggests quality can conceivably be driven by other factors such as pride, altruism and social conscience.

There are many other themes addressed in Kautsky’s work that provide the basis for a defensible legacy, and others that are, perhaps, less defensible. Materialism and determinism are still widely considered respectable philosophical positions, and Kautsky is quite radical and unyielding in his adherence to such perspectives. Yet, intuitively, that position remains problematic, as how could consciousness and will arise out of a purely material (i.e., mechanical) process? Herbert Marcuse had dared to posit a great refusal of the most marginal and oppressed as creating a new historic agent for revolution (Marcuse, 1968, pp 9-15). The idea that such minorities could lead a revolution is suggestive of a radical voluntarism. Perhaps the reality is somewhere between the extremes of voluntarism and materialist determinism.

It is possible to argue from a Marxist perspective that something has changed in the evolution of capitalism, such that the system evolved in a way that neutralised the very critical elements it had given rise to: the enlightened and revolutionary working class who, according to Marx and Kautsky were supposed to be the system’s “grave diggers”. The question here is whether Kautskyan determinism and materialism are helps or hindrances under such circumstances. Critical theorists such as Theodore Adorno and Herbert Marcuse would have it that a “purely affirmative” capitalist culture industry lulls and deceives us into passivity, and decades since he made such observations psychological manipulation via mass culture appears more pervasive and powerful than ever. (Crozier in Beilharz (Ed), 1991 , pp 93-97) In addition, the decline of mass factory labour – the phenomenon of post-industrialism – also contributes to the demobilisation of the working class and the decline of a distinct class consciousness.

A Kautskyan, pure materialist outlook might hold the position to be hopeless. Again, this might begin to look like “a bad totality with no way out” (Beilharz, Adorno), and yet again, perhaps the new information technology provides the material basis for somewhat levelling the ground in the contest of ideas. A moderate voluntarism might hold some prospect for the human imagination and for the mobilisation of free collective human will. Kautsky would reject suppositions of free will and unbound human imagination. But perhaps he would appreciate the new technology as a material basis for hope, and for asymmetrical political struggle.

It is also notable that relative abundance creates new (i.e., relative) needs, and the relevance of Kautsky’s legacy today must be measured not only in light of enduring insights but also in light of developments Kautsky did not and perhaps could not anticipate. While he foresaw limits to social education in his own time, today there are
the material means to provide education not only for the labour market but for active and critical citizenship and for well-rounded human beings. The question of whether workers and citizens can be mobilised around the defence of newer established rights (pensions, leave, education, health) or even inspired to fight for new social conquests (e.g., a standard 32-hour week) is an open one. Kautsky found it difficult wrestling with the prospect of uncertainty in response to revisionism. Today, radicals face the imperative of fostering hope without the teleological certainties of the old Marxism.

The question of economism versus political socialism is also interesting to consider in light of Kautsky’s work. Often he is accused of economism for his insistence – following Engels – that the economic base determines the cultural and political superstructure in the last instance, even if with relative autonomy in the interim. Perhaps this important qualification, of relative autonomy, makes the Kautskyan position more nuanced than is commonly supposed. Kautsky maintains, for example, the distinction between trade union and social-democratic consciousness precisely because the struggle over wages and conditions alone is not enough to resolve capitalist contradictions. Insofar as the state provides an obstacle, the precondition for transforming the economy is the political transformation of the state, and hence economic and the political struggles are necessarily intertwined. Undoubtedly, Kautsky underplayed the importance of political, religious and cultural motives driving great struggles, and largely reduced those struggles to the context of the class struggle and evolving mode of production.

Antagonism was a recurring theme for Kautsky in the context of a presumed class struggle, placing him in stark relief against modern social-democratic ideologies that seek social peace based upon social amelioration. Revolution for Kautsky did not necessarily mean violence, chaos, insurrection but simply qualitative change; the achievement of a new constitution one way of another (preferably through non-violent class struggle) with the consequence of a democratic state and a democratic economy (According to Marxist orthodoxy this state would be a ‘proletarian’ state; defending proletarian interests). In Kautskyan terms it could be considered democratic in a broader sense as well; as Kautsky comes to defend the liberal and democratic rights of the bourgeoisie itself – these issues are considered in Chapter Seven). Kautsky allowed for the possibility of gradualism in the social revolution, as also supposed by the reformists (though elsewhere he considered revolution as potentially being a relative rapid process; hence arguably he is inconsistent) (Kautsky, 1902, pp 1-4). However, he stood firm on the qualitative nature of the change he pursued for the state and the economy. Given his assumption of the state’s class nature, he saw political revolution as the necessary prerequisite for such qualitative change, though we might suppose that the very process of the working class achieving a dominant position in the state could also comprise a struggle lasting decades (or contrary to Kautsky’s optimism, we may now question whether that goal will be reached).
However, the modern Third Way of Giddens does not even seriously engage with questions of revolution. Indeed, given Giddens’ emphasis on a narrow “redistribution of possibilities” based on a kind of modern day social democratic “centrism”, it appears Giddens and those who follow him would consider the very idea absurd. Largely they abandon any radical redistributive agenda, arguing for social and economic inclusion as the means of conciliation. (Pierson, C, 2001, pp 12-14) Indeed, for Giddens we are “after” socialism. (Giddens, A, 1998, p 1) Hence, in ‘The Third Way’, a definitive text in social democracy’s “self-liquidation” from the 1990s onward, Giddens asserts that communism and socialism have “dissolved” and perhaps “mean nothing” following the Soviet collapse. (Giddens, 1998, p 24) In practice, all that is left is amelioration for the most marginal and oppressed. Although indeed, the corresponding policies of amelioration do matter a great deal to the excluded, the impoverished, and the marginalised themselves.

However, the logic of capitalism is generally towards greater intensity of exploitation, and conciliation must also mean lasting peace, if it is to be substantial. Kautsky looks towards a socialist future where there is universal conciliation and social peace, and not on the basis of a compromise settlement but on the grounds of the elimination of the antagonisms caused by exploitation, capitalist contradictions and imperialism.

Kautsky’s confidence for the future seems to have been misplaced. Also questionable given the subsequent history was Bernstein’s apparent belief that partial conciliation based on universal citizenship and social as well as liberal rights would form a bulwark against violent ideologies (e.g., fascism). Yet, citizenship does not end the class struggle. Rather, it establishes a framework and a foothold for that struggle, which can prevent an escalation into ever-greater violence and repression and hence the corruption of the very emancipatory ambitions that drive socialist movements.

Nonetheless, this does not exclude great struggles between great social forces. The corporatist structures that ultimately developed in Sweden are notable as they effectively transposed the class struggle to a different, institutional level. This has been theorized at length by Swedish sociologist, Walter Korpi in his ‘Power Resources’ approach (Korpi, 1983, pp 33-46): Kautsky’s vision of such great struggles seems well adaptable to a Gramscian vision of wars of position as waged over the course of decades through the various strongholds of civil society. In this way Kautsky’s insights remain a valuable legacy.

Although the promise of social peace has great appeal for many, and can provide the vehicle for reform agendas, albeit agendas which do not involve the definitive resolution of capitalist contradictions. Provisional settlements are important in the context of such organised class struggle spanning decades, but in a world where the teleological guarantees of the old Marxism appear discredited, a historic compromise that provides dignity and security and environmental sustainability would certainly be
a step forward. Discussing such a compromise at length falls outside the scope of this thesis.

This brings us to the theme of immiseration and class bifurcation. Here Bernstein largely appears vindicated. Exploitation in the sense of surplus extraction has become more and more intense, and technological and productive advances have created relative abundance even amidst gross and unnecessary waste. The issue of environmental sustainability throws this state of affairs into question but nonetheless, there is now the scenario of relative material prosperity even amidst more and more intense exploitation, and the rescission of past labour and welfare rights.

Shifts in the world economic order may worsen conditions further in so far as the West is concerned. Class bifurcation remains a tendency operating alongside other tendencies towards social differentiation, and the re-emergence of middle or intermediary classes in different forms as capitalism revolutionises and modernises itself constantly. Here Bronner has considered both the virtues and limits of a “structural” conception of class for the modern-day, also pointing to the role of intermediary elements in maintaining social control, and complementary “political” notions of class (Bronner, 2011, pp 162-163). Further, Piketty has suggested a diversity of interpretations of the composition of the middle class, positing the centrality of degrees of income and wealth, but not only the relationship of capital to labour (Piketty, pp 251-255). Piketty also notes that differences in capital ownership specifically still involve extreme inequality. For instance, he notes, for 2010-2011 in the United States, “the top decile own 72 percent of America’s wealth, while the bottom half claim just 2 per cent”. (Piketty, p 257)

Though he failed to predict the rise of fascism, Kautsky’s supposition of ever-greater economic crises appears to vindicated, beginning with the Great Depression. Tendencies towards monopoly – in practice manifesting as oligopoly – intensified exploitation, alienation, crises of overproduction and the correspondingly desperate attempts to expand the world market, class struggle – all remain with us today as by-products of modern capitalism. Marx’s ‘unearthed secret’ of surplus value, popularised by Kautsky, still implies in its functioning a devastating moral critique of capitalism; while also comprising the means of capitalist self-reproduction. (Bronner, pp 155-158; Aarons, 2008, pp 31-37; Aarons, 2009, pp 12-13, pp 15-16, 82-83; Hirst and Thompson, pp 59-61)

For all of this, Kautsky remained a figure bound by his time. When revolution did arrive – in Germany 1919 – Kautsky acquiesced to a relatively modest reform programme. Bronner observes how there was no expropriation of “the great industrial firms and the Junker estates”, and there was no purging of “the reactionary bureaucracy”. Against Kautsky’s ambitions, Bronner notes the reality of an emerging regime with “no new social values, symbols or ideals to inspire the young republic”. Kautsky wished to avoid the Bolshevist path with its terror and centralism, its
militarisation of labour, and the horrors of civil war. Hence, the lack of any inspirational narrative saw Germany emerge as a reluctant republic with an embittered population, parts of which later on, amidst the German inflation, the French occupation of the Ruhr and the Depression were all too ready to abandon a democracy that for them was the embodiment of betrayal and humiliation. Moreover, influenced by wartime ideology and the pre-war ideological climate, the German proletariat was divided from within by ideologies of “racism, militarism [and] nationalism” (Bronner, p 588, pp 596-597). Further, the remnant German armed forces, though small in size – some 100,000 strong (Craig, p 429) – remained un-revolutionised and uncontested.

Kautsky remained wedded to the highest principles, even though his middle path in 1919 ought have been more ambitious, more radically distinct from both Bolshevism and the right-dominated SPD. Writing in opposition to “the violence of Austrian anarchists” (and we observe here the philosophy of the propaganda of the deed, the policy of assassinations, etc.) Kautsky wrote:

Social Democracy is a Party of human love, and it must always remain conscious of its character even in the midst of the most frenzied political fights. (Kautsky in Steenson, p 80)

Steenson in his biography of Kautsky depicts a man, “very sensitive to human suffering”. Kautsky’s concern for human suffering was not merely abstract. Steenson relates that Kautsky’s disposition was later to “cause him to baulk in the face of the apparent necessity for revolutionary violence” (Steenson, p 80). Kautsky’s position on violence is especially important in relation to the theme of Chapter Seven, ‘Of War and Revolution, 1914-1925
Chapter Six:

Austro-Marxism during the pre-War period

The period covered by this chapter, 1906-1914, immediately follows the height of the revisionist controversy but come before the historic split of social democracy into two camps – reformist social democracy and communism (Bolshevism). During this period, the movement that came to be known as ‘Austro-Marxism’ was an early example of what might be termed a Third Road movement. The Austro-Marxists shared the goal of democratic socialism with the pre-World War I Second International-affiliated parties that largely remained true to the orthodoxy as disseminated by Kautsky. However in comparison with the Kautskyian relative Second Way of this period, the Austro-Marxists provided a number of innovations. Importantly, this was the period in which Kautsky shifted towards ‘centrism’, and where that ‘centrism’ and those adhering to the old ‘orthodoxy’ remained dominant at a purely formal, theoretical level. Importantly this was the period in which Kautsky shifted towards ‘centrism’ - and where that ‘centrism’ and those adhering to the old ‘orthodoxy’ remained dominant at a ‘purely formal’ (ie: theoretical) level.

Gruber traces the first signs of the Austro-Marxist movement to 1895 as founders of the Independent Association of Socialist Students and Academicians (Gruber, p 31). Those who came to be associated with that term were significant in that they effectively attempted to stake out a middle road between Bolshevism and reformist social democracy, both in theory and in practice. Gruber argues that in fact “there were two” Austro-Marxisms. First, a “small group of Marxist theoreticians and intellectuals active in the decade before World War I: Karl Renner, Rudolf Hilferding, Max Adler, Otto Bauer, and Friedrich Adler”. Second, the later movement comprised the:

SDAP oligarchy of doers and reformers during the First Republic from 1918, including the leading figures in the Viennese municipal and provincial government, party leaders, and those responsible for the party’s educational, cultural, and publication activities. (Gruber, pp 31-32)

Gruber struggles to find a “common intellectual denominator”. He observes that Bauer and Hilferding “shared an interest in imperialism”; and Renner and Bauer “shared an interest in the state in relation to nationalism”, while: Max Adler and Friedrich Adler “sought to return the subjective ingredient into the calculation of the course and progress of human events”. With regard their formative influences – “for
Renner it was John Stuart Mill; for Hilferding, Karl Kautsky; for Max Adler, Kant; and for Bauer and Friedrich Adler, Ernst Mach” (Gruber, p 31).

The opposing themes of relevance for our consideration here include unity/conciliation versus division on the left, and also “revolutionary enthusiasm” reconciled with “realpolitik” – though by no means an exhaustive representation of the themes and oppositions explored by the Austro-Marxists. Also relevant are themes of: Reform and revolution, with slow revolution posited as a compromise synthesis; the prospect of nationalism and internationalism, reconciled in Austria-Hungary via a state of nationalities; the co-existence of science with ethics/aesthetics; and finally, determinism/materialism versus voluntarism/Cartesian dualism.

Otto Bauer expressed both the theoretical and the practical-political spirit of Austro-Marxism succinctly, that,

where the working class is divided, one workers’ party embodies sober, day-to-day Realpolitik, while the other embodies the revolutionary will to attain the ultimate goal. [But] … Only where a split is avoided are sober Realpolitik and revolutionary enthusiasm united in one spirit. (Bauer in Bottomore, pp 46-47)

Later to coin the term “slow revolution”, the Austro-Marxists notably attempted to reconcile revolutionary and reformist viewpoints – and real-world movements – together into a cohesive perspective. Tom Bottomore has noted that the focus of the Austro-Marxists was usually practical, rather than in the realms of pure or abstract theory, as evidenced by their party-political activism, their educational work and their holding elected offices in the Austrian Republic at various times (Bottomore, pp 3-4, 37). It is also notable that even before the Bolshevist/reformist schism with the 1917 Russian Revolution, the Austro-Marxists provided commentary and analysis on themes as broad as socialist culture, the further development of modern capitalism and imperialism, the development of guild socialism in Britain, changes in class structure, as well as nationalities and nationalism, and thereafter into the 1930s (Bottomore pp 3-4). They provided a rigorous analysis of the post-World War I revolutions, especially the revolution in their homeland, Austria, in which they were active participants, and they provided a comprehensive analysis of the rise of fascism, accompanied by a plea for unity on the Left to meet the fascist threat.

The Austro-Marxists’ work on the national question was especially relevant during the 1906-1914 time frame under discussion in this chapter, wherein national and ethnic tensions over Austria-Hungary served as one catalyst for the war that was to divide social democracy. Before considering their work in this field, attention will be given to Austro-Marxists in comparison with Kautsky, especially in the field of materialism and ethics.
Materialism and Human Thought

The Austro-Marxists shared a degree of practical common ground with Karl Kautsky, especially during the immediate post-World War I period, but there were crucial differences between some Austro-Marxists and Kautsky.

As Tom Bottomore argues,

they were critical of Kautsky’s somewhat dogmatic and unsophisticated materialism and determinism; they wanted to take account of new conceptions in epistemology and the philosophy of science, and to engage in empirical investigations of new social phenomena. (Bottomore and Goode, p 12)

So, instead, the Austro-Marxists, most notably Max Adler, propagated a version of Marxism conceived as sociology, as social science, whose aim was to discern the forces of causation. These included the horizon provided by experience – more specifically the so-called economic base, including the means of production, distribution and exchange – but also the transcendent phenomena of free will, consciousness and of the mind. Consciousness and mind enjoyed transcendent properties that could not be reproduced through physical motion (Bottomore and Goode, p 20, Kolakowski, pp 560-563, 572).

In contradistinction to Kautsky, Adler’s supposition is that an autonomy of ideas is not inconceivable:

A deduction of this kind from the inner logic of the object (as it is customarily called) is admittedly not entirely incorrect because all these areas of intellectual creation … rest upon a formal lawfulness of the mind which is self-confirming. (Adler in Bottomore and Goode, p 257)

At the same time, and with regard to the base/superstructure Adler holds that even ‘economic phenomena themselves are never “material” in the materialist sense, but have precisely a “mental” character’, in the sense they involve conscious, willing human beings (Adler in Bottomore and Goode, p 254). Reflecting upon these debates, Carl Grunberg, the professor who taught and inspired Renner, Hilferding and Adler at the University of Vienna was to say of Max Adler that ‘he made the necessary distinction between “historical materialism” as a systematic, empirical, historical discipline, and “philosophical materialism” as a metaphysical doctrine’ (Grunberg in Bottomore and Goode, pp 9-10). Thus Adler attempts to bridge the divide between Marxism and idealism.

Adler’s epistemology is suggestive of the limits of Marxist dialectical thinking. As Kolakowski argues:
According to Adler, dialectical thought is its own object. In the dialectical movement every concept is understood in relation to its opposite – not by the ordinary comparison of one content with another, but by reason of the tendency of each towards self-cancellation. Our thought never embraces the whole of Being, but singles out particular aspects or qualities; consciousness, however, is aware of its own limitations and strives to overcome them by relating its own content to the concrete whole (Totalitat), which is itself inexpressible. (Kolakowski, p 574)

By this reckoning it is impossible to truly grasp totality. Marx’s attempt to grasp the entirety of social movement through the class struggle and evolving means of production cannot help but be limited by the constraints of human thinking and perception. Feeding into debates over causation, the mental sphere, determinism and free will, meanwhile, Max Adler explained his position as:

[Insisting] upon … diverse types of causality and that the form which the causal relation takes in social life is not “mechanical causality”, but one that is mediated by human consciousness. (Adler in Bottomore and Goode, p 20)

Therefore:

All the phenomena of social life, including those of the economic sphere, are mental, not material, phenomena … [And so finally] in some sense … the relations of causality among them are … relations between individual human minds … [This] involves treating motives as causes … [but not in the context of] individual psychological phenomena but as forces which are at work in “socialised humanity”. (Adler in Bottomore and Goode, p 20)

There are potential arguments here to the effect that human will is not entirely free in that it is conditioned by the social totality, including an a priori social disposition existing in humanity’ we need to take account also of the motives that arise in that wide context. This does not negate arguments to the effect that consciousness itself as well as free will cannot be explained merely as more complex consequences of purely physical motion (i.e., there is the question of quality and not merely complexity).

The consequence of all this for Adler was that “historical materialism” was not any kind of “objective science”, if interpreted after the fashion of philosophical materialism and/or metaphysics. For Adler, philosophical materialism could not account for the mind or, indeed, the soul. As for Marxism – as a science it was “ontologically neutral”. There was no essential nexus between philosophical materialism and science (Kolakowski, p 565).
The notion of transcendence was to appear again in Adler’s work with his supposition a priori social consciousness: the notion that human beings were ‘hard-wired’ as social beings. Here the object of Marxism was to again realise our individuality in community with other human beings, and overcome the depersonalising, atomising effects of capitalism (Kolakowski, pp 565-572).

**What is, and what should be**

At the time the Austro-Marxists were writing there was a very substantial debate occurring about neo-Kantianism, as it came to be known, led in part by Hermann Cohen. Max Adler explained Cohen’s position in 1925, in his work *Kant und der Marxismus:*

The requirement that no man should be regarded merely as means, but that every man should be treated at the same time as an end, is an idea which excludes all exploitation … The idea of a realm of ends, which makes all social unreason and oppression impossible, as inexpedient, is the idea of *solidaristic society* which no longer permits class conflict (Adler in Bottomore and Goode, pp 62-63).

In some ways at variance with Adler, Otto Bauer held that, “science must come first, before we can successfully pose the moral question”. In other words, he contested that socialists ought to *begin* with “the materialist conception of history” and “the social conditions of existence of the proletariat” that inform “class ideology” (Bauer in Bottomore and Goode, pp 81-83).

Nonetheless, Bauer conceded that Kant’s doctrine,

is the final bastion to which we can retreat whenever ethical scepticism obstructs the naïve moral judgements of class maxims discovered by science (Bottomore and Goode, pp 81-82).

Further, he concluded,

if we regard socialism no longer as a question of science, but of life, and if we also seek an answer for the waverer … [then] we do need Kant’s ethics. [But even here] discovery of the tendencies of capitalist development must precede the practical attitude to capitalism. (Bottomore and Goode, 83)

In this sense, of reserving an important role for Kantian ethics, even as a last appeal for waverers, Adler and Bauer were set apart from Karl Kautsky as he rejected unequivocally the “ethical-aesthetic method” (Bottomore and Goode, p 84). In order to educate socialists, Bauer is at one with Kautsky:
We should not preach morality but investigate the tendencies of development of the capitalist mode of production and diffuse knowledge about this process. (Bottomore and Goode, p 84)

Therefore, in the manner derived in Marxism from Hegelianism, the difference between ‘what is’ and ‘what should be’ was uncertain as there was an underlying assumption that capitalism and its development were somehow part of a necessary and inevitable telos. The neo-Kantian Karl Vorlander, for instance, urged Marxists to explicitly endorse a philosophy based on the values implicit in Marx’s work and especially his critique of alienation, and in that context, the need for human dignity and freedom and a richness to every human life (Kolakowski, pp 557-559). These are the kind of issues explored by the neo-Kantians, and following them, some of the Austro-Marxists.

Otto Bauer concluded as follows: “[The] recognition that socialism will come into existence does not yet lead me to fight for it”. Regarding this not as a “scientific” question but, “one involving a practical attitude”, “it is certainly a moral question” (Bauer in Bottomore and Goode, p 81).

The Austro-Marxists on the National Question

The Austro-Marxist perspective on the national question was unique in the context of its development against a backdrop of an effectively multinational, multi-cultural Austria-Hungarian Empire. Before the First World War especially, the question was perhaps more pressing for the Austrian Social Democrats than for any other social-democratic party, with their attempts to mediate between and promote working-class unity among various nationalities.

Loew accuses the Austro-Marxists of opportunism on the nationalities question, pointing to discrimination against non-German workers on the matter of the conditions of labour and provision of social amenities. However it can be reasonably argued that the Austro-Marxists’ state-preserving impulses were related more directly to the economic and political viability of any future socialist federation emerging from the old Habsburg Empire. Also for the Austro-Marxists, and for many on the Left, nationalism was seen as a potentially divisive factor in attempts to build a truly internationalist outlook. Given the multi-national, multi-cultural nature of Austria-Hungary, the nationalities question was not one they could afford to ignore (Loew, pp 19-21; Lesor, p 118; Rabinbach, p 13).

As early as 1899, the Austrian Social Democrats at their Brno Congress promoted the solution of transforming Austria into a democratic multinational state, to be divided into, “autonomous national regions of self-administration, adapted as closely as
possible to linguistic boundaries” (Loew, p 20) and, hence, they promoted “the recognition of the territorial and cultural claims of the nationalities within the framework of a liberalised and federal state” (Rabinbach, p 14).

For Karl Renner in particular, the reconciliation of nationalist impulses in Austria-Hungary could provide a model for a future socialist federation, a democratic and federal “state of nationalities” (*Nationalitätenstaat*) where nationalities could find self-expression but at the same time be reconciled (Renner in Bottomore and Goode, pp 31-32). Probably Renner would have seen the modern-day European Union as progressing towards this goal.

It is important, however, to note that Otto Bauer rejected a “national conception of history”, as he termed it, which “strives for a mechanics of nations”. Instead, “the nationality of the individual is only one aspect of his determination by the history of society, by the development of the conditions and techniques of labour” (Bauer in Bottomore, p 109). Bauer also considered the nationalities question extensively in *Die Nationalitätenfrage und Sozialdemokratie* in 1907 (Bottomore and Goode, p 102), developing a “systematic conception” of nationhood, with,

| a common history as the effective cause, common culture and common descent as the means by which it produces its effects, a common language as the mediator of the common culture, both as its product and its producer. (Bottomore and Goode, p 103) |

Bauer’s analysis of nationality also considered the impact of class through the centuries, with modern nationalism only a relatively recent phenomenon. Reminiscent of Marx, Bauer traces the “unitary nation as a community of descent” that existed under “primitive communism”; conditions that altered with “settled agriculture and the development of private property” (Bottomore and Goode, p 108). At this point, he contended, national-consciousness became fixed among the “medieval knights, and the educated classes” bound together by “close economic, political and social intercourse” including a common language. Thus ruling classes were bound “to a particular nation”, but it was a national culture that excluded the “peasants and small farmers” (Bottomore and Goode, pp 106-108).

However, capitalism saw the extension of this culture to the bourgeoisie; thus the era of nationalist liberal bourgeois revolutions. Bauer further noted how: “Modern capitalism [also] begins gradually to distinguish the lower classes in each nation more sharply from each other” (Bauer in Bottomore and Goode, pp 106-107). This is notable as such tendencies became manifest in the very worst way soon thereafter, with the First World War, and the deployment of nationalist ideology to justify the greatest slaughter in the history of humanity to that point.
Bauer concluded, “only socialism will give the whole people a share in the national culture” (Notably Bauer wrote at a time where much culture was inaccessible to the working classes). He thus envisaged “the development of the nation into a homogenous community of education, labour, and culture” where according to “the nationality principle … the external power should consolidate and serve the internal community” (Bauer in Bottomore and Goode, pp 110-112). Further, “if the masses see the free national community as their goal, socialism also shows them the way to this goal; for socialism is necessarily based on democracy” (Bauer in Bottomore and Goode, p 112-116).

Furthermore, in a new international socialist economic community, small nations would become viable by specialising in the international division of labour, and with co-dependence between nations and states in itself a force for reconciliation (Bauer in Bottomore and Goode, p 112-116). Ultimately, in a further elaboration of the Austro-Marxists’ conception of national-cultural self-determination, Bauer wrote:

[The] socialist mode of production leads … to the organisation of humanity into national communities … [But] The international division of labour leads necessarily to the unification of the national communities in a social structure of a higher order. All nations will be united for the common domination of nature, but the totality will be organised in national communities which will be encouraged to develop autonomously and enjoy freely their national culture – that is the socialist principle of nationality. (Bauer in Bottomore and Goode, p 117)

Bauer also envisaged that with this process being “[incorporated] … into a community of international law”, nations secure for themselves “power even beyond the limits of [their] territory” (Bauer in Bottomore and Goode, p 117). Hence Bauer anticipates the League of Nations and ultimately the United Nations – though these did not adopt a socialist character, except, say, for Soviet influence on the content of the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Bauer’s propositions seemed viable under the assumption of some future all-embracing international socialist community. In reality, the destruction of the Austro-Hungarian Habsburg Empire with the end of the First World War, and the relegation of Austria to a “rump” confined the Austro-Marxists within a relatively small local political milieu. Meanwhile, Karl Renner observed the consequences of the liberal and nationalist bourgeois revolutions of the nineteenth century. From these changed circumstances there arose “the principle of nationality” according to which “every nation should form one state, and every state should embrace only one nation!” (Renner in Bottomore and Goode, p 118). The liberal currents in these revolutions also stood against “the internal absence of rights”, but baulked at proletarian internationalism (Bauer in Bottomore and Goode, p 119). It was nationalism that was to provide the ideological justification for the imperialist First World War.
Indeed, even before the onset of the War, the Austro-Marxists found they could not maintain their own little ‘Austrian International’, with the splintering of the trade-union movement on national lines in 1912 and the splintering of the parliamentary party in that year. The failure of the Austro-Marxists to maintain their own International within the bounds of the Austro-Hungarian Empire bode poorly for the future, and for the ability of international socialism to contain national tensions within a multinational movement wherein common humanity and class were to be of greater import than national impulses, which might be exploited to rationalise imperialist war (Loew, pp 15-23).

Rabinbach explains how Austrian socialism held an “optimistic view of history as the rational development of humanity” providing reconciliation with regard “the problem of ethnic particularism”. When war came in 1914 Victor Adler was convinced the socialist movement could not prevent the conflict. Adler came to an agreement with the Kaiser for a “civil peace” for the war’s duration. A rift emerged between Victor Alder, Renner and “the younger and more radical generation of Friedrich Adler, and Otto Bauer” on the question of how to respond to the war. Organised peace-making efforts were to emerge only later in 1915 at Zimmerwald (Rabinbach, p 17-19).

**Conclusion: The Legacy of the Austro-Marxists**

From the pre-World War I period, the Austro-Marxists have left us an important and defensible legacy. They attempted to practically and theoretically reconcile nationalisms with Marxism and socialist practice in the form of a kind of socialist federalism. In their efforts to seek such a response to the nationalities question, they understood the dynamics and tensions from which world war was to emerge; and as such their ideas and their example remain relevant for the modern day, where national and cultural divisions are still deployed to justify violent conflict.

Their engagement with neo-Kantianism and such themes as free will, materialism, ethics, social science and idealism provided a source of theoretical innovation that addressed questions also of pertinence in the modern day. In particular, these innovations amidst otherwise orthodox Marxist conceptions of capitalist crisis, internationalism and class struggle suggest a potential meeting of the ways between Marxism and, as Sheri Berman has more recently proclaimed it – democratic revisionism. (Berman, pp 14-16, pp 204-209) As the early Austro-Marxists seemed to understand well, the political and the economic, and the subjective and the objective condition each other.
Chapter Seven:

Of War and Revolution, 1914-1925

The aim in this chapter is to consider the centrist and leftist Third Roads that arose in the context of war and revolution during the period 1914-1925. Discussion begins with a brief historical overview of the period, including an assessment of Kautsky’s role at the outset of the First World War, followed by a consideration of three key texts of Bolshevism during the time frame: Lenin’s *The State and Revolution* (1917); his *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* (1918); and Trotsky’s *Terrorism and Communism* (1920). This milieu is important to establishing the content of the emergent Second Way, with Bolshevism coming to replace ‘classical’ Marxist social democracy as the dominant revolutionary discourse on the Left. Some of the Bolshevist arguments are, indeed, in response to Kautsky’s criticisms, but it is easier and clearer to first establish their position as the emerging Second Way and thereafter explore Kautsky’s differences with the new, dominant left-revolutionary discourse.

The chapter also considers: The content of the Kautskyan Third Road – as signified in his important work *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat* (1919); the Bolsheviks’ critique of Kautsky; the ways in which Marxist centrism emerged as a Third Road; as well as Kautsky’s response to various contested ideological themes. In this we will also consider Rosa Luxemburg’s response to Bolshevism. Finally, the chapter will discuss Rosa Luxemburg’s seminal (leftist) response to the 1917 October Russian Revolution, and the actions of the Austro-Marxists during these years of war and revolution.

**War and Political Debate**

Arguably, World War I was sparked by European militarist rivalries and secret diplomacy amidst a complex array of alliances between the European great powers (Joll, pp 180-182). Though most Marxists attempted to trace the conflict more deeply to colonialism and imperialism, militarist rivalries saw a European arms race funded in part by the big trusts, monopolies and finance capitalism, and to the benefit of the armament firms, shipping companies and “metallurgical, mining, construction and electrical industries” et al. Others have argued that this imperialism was also driven by a race for captive markets to “absorb the products which the underpaid workers at home could not consume” (S. Bernstein, pp 127-128, 157-158). The economic
argument had it that capitalism demanded progressive expansion into new markets in order to maintain profitability. This was a perspective developed by Lenin in his *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. (where Lenin drew significantly from the radical British radical thinker, John A. Hobson)

The 1907 Conference of the Second International at Stuttgart declared that war was inherent in capitalism, that,

it is the duty of the working class … fortified by the unifying activity of the International Bureau, to do everything to prevent the outbreak of war by whatever means seem to them most effective. (Joll, pp 76-77)

Yet, the International was light on details of specific measures and strategies. Joll contends that the Social Democrats were sincere but cowed into submission. In France in particular, there was the threat of a revocation of the suffrage; and in Germany, the threat of reviving anti-socialist laws after the fashion of Bismarck (Joll, pp 76-77).

Kautsky had accurately predicted war a few years beforehand but international social democracy as expressed in the Second International collapsed in terms of its opposition to the war. In Germany, The SPD parliamentary caucus voted 78 to 14 in favour of war credits. With war looming, prominent liberal humanist French socialist, Jean Jaures, was assassinated after making a stand for peace. His position had long been one of upholding an ethos of internationalism as a bulwark against any such conflict. Samuel Bernstein says of Jaures that he blended materialism and idealism in his own theory of justice, and that for him, socialism was “more the doctrine of humanity itself than that of a class”, with Jaures holding the prospect of socialism through altruism and conciliation, and not just class struggle. His words from as early as 1904 were prophetic of the position of German social democracy (Joll, pp 5, 64-65; S. Bernstein, pp 135-141): “Behind the inflexibility of theoretical formulas … you concealed from your own proletariat your inability to act.” (Joll, p 5, 64-65; S. Bernstein, pp 135-141)

Jaures’s observation was similar to one by Engels in his later years:

What can the consequence of all this be, except that the party will suddenly, at the moment of decision, not know what to do, that there is unclarity and uncertainty about the most decisive points because these points have never been discussed? (Engels in Hobsbawm, 2011, p 69)

Jaures also predicted, barely two days before his assassination, that the war would lead to revolution in Europe, with the masses “sobered” (and presumably enraged) by all the “disease, poverty and death” (Jaures in S. Bernstein, p 160).
Most other leading Social Democrats devolved into “social chauvinism”, as Lenin was to call it, adopting all kinds of theoretical and practical contortions to reconcile the impending bloodbath with social democracy. While Joll contends it would have proved “impossible” to prevent the conflict through a general strike, the fact remains that this was no excuse for the enthusiasm of many right-wing Social Democrats in embracing war (Joll, p 75). In Germany, for instance, much of the social-democratic movement – the right wing – and trade unions had acceded to the authority of the imperial German state, abandoning revolution, and in return for the relatively modest promise of “civil liberties”, “labour legislation”, representative government, welfare provision and the like (O’Boyle, pp 825, 828-829). As Armstrong explains, the workers and their unions largely adopted a nationalism, the threat of which did not really dawn on the social-democratic centre and left until it was “far too late”, leaving their internationalism “secondary and remote” (Armstrong, pp 255-257).

Figures such as Bernstein and Kautsky were later to agitate relentlessly behind the scenes for peace, but in the crucial year of 1914 social democracy was overwhelmingly caught off-guard (Salvadori, pp 115-121, 128, 148, 181-182). Crucially, the unions had already been co-opted, and Kautsky feared social-democratic organisation could be smashed if it promoted resolute but, to his mind, futile action, such as a mass strike, to prevent the conflict. In Kautskyan terms the German proletariat was not sufficiently mature to successfully fight against the war (Salvadori, pp 73-75, 91-95, 109-113, 115-121, 130-131, 147; Joll p 55; Bernstein, Samuel, pp 130-131). The social-democratic co-option was itself to provide an object lesson that was to benefit the (Bolshevist) communists following the split on the Left; and for many was to discredit even radical social democracy)

Kautsky had already stated in 1907 that in the event of a war he would not necessarily be able to tell “aggression” from “defence”. He nonetheless promoted international solidarity at this stage to prevent a “massacre and slaughter” (Salvadori, pp 122-123). At the crucial moment, however, Kautsky was at best confused, promoting abstention on the matter of war credits. Importantly, the SPD parliamentary caucus position included a statement that it would oppose the war once it “assumed a character of conquest on Germany’s part”. Most damningly of all, this somewhat redeeming sentence was deleted “at the specific demand of Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg” (Salvadori, pp 181-185).

Amidst this, Kautsky maintained an “intermediary position”. He longed most of all for an end to the war and a resumption of normalcy, that is, peaceful and steady growth in the strength and maturity of the working class. He consistently argued for “a peace without annexations on any side”: a position of “conciliationism” (Salvadori, pp 183-185). For this he was increasingly isolated by the party’s now-dominant right wing. As the war progressed the SPD right wing became less and less tolerant. Theory in general, especially Marxist theory, was shunned in favour of a ‘practical’ approach (O’Boyle, p 825). In February 1915 Kautsky had made the observation:
The people grouped around David and the trade-union leaders believe that the time has come to purge the party of any “Marxism” … Naturally what they want is not a split but their domination over the entire apparatus of the party and our reduction to the position of mere figureheads … We must be prepared for the harshest internal struggles. (Kautsky in Salvadori, pp 206)

The Spartacists and the social-democratic centre met in a general conference in Berlin, calling for an end to the war, for peace “without victors and vanquished”; a peace “of the peoples”, “who alone were capable of checking the belligerent ambitions of the great powers”. Further, they called for “self-determination of peoples”; “disarmament”; and “peace to be guaranteed in future by the proletariat”. In March 1916 the leader of the socialist parliamentary group, Hugo Hasse, came out in opposition to the war. The majority Social Democrats responded by immediately expelling the Opposition. Indeed, by now their own perspective had shifted more clearly to one of conquest as opposed to national defence. The consequence was the formation of the USPD, the Independent Social Democratic Party. Later, in 1917, the Reichstag itself came out in support of “permanent reconciliation of peoples”, but the power to make peace was not theirs (Salvadori, p 210, Joll, pp 216-217).

An international socialist peace movement against the war also arose during these years, beginning in Zimmerwald, Switzerland in 1915. Lenin was notable on the Left of this movement, urging that the imperialist war be turned to revolution, and that a clean break be made with the formation of a Third International. Others such as the left internationalist Russian Menshevik, Julius Martov were more cautious, supposing a liberal bourgeois revolution was necessary to create the preconditions for socialism; and urging a negotiated peace (Joll, pp 224-225; Meldolesi, pp 1836-1838).

During this period, Kautsky also came out in favour of the notion of a democratic “confederation of European states” (perhaps complemented by his supposition of some future ultra-imperialism.) This was to involve, in Kautsky’s words: “An end to policies of conquest” as well as “disarmament, complete freedom of trade, closer ties between nations, and democracy”, though without giving up the fight against capitalism (Meldolesi, pp 1838-1839).

As Joll observes, in the wake of the bloodbath of the Somme, with some 1.35 million slaughtered, the German war machine collapsed in 1918. Lacking reserves of men, they had no answer to an effective allied advance and its innovative use of tank warfare. The Germans sought an armistice on 3 October 1918 and peace was finally agreed on 11 November 1918. With the legitimacy of the warring powers also exhausted revolution soon spread to Germany and Austria-Hungary. Indeed, it had already erupted in Russia in 1917. Whereas “the old organs of administration remained intact”, in Germany and with its old guard of the armed forces ultimately limiting that country to a kind of half-hearted bourgeois liberal revolution, it is events in Russia that the following discussion turns (Joll pp 207, 236-245).
Revolution in Russia

After years of horrific warfare on the Eastern Front, the Russian Tsar was overthrown in the revolution of February 1917. The provisional government that arose from this revolution did not provide the peace and the radical redistribution of land that many demanded, however. For many months a situation of dual power persisted, with the Russian Duma existing alongside the workers’ and soldiers’ Soviets. During this period discontent simmered in light of the ongoing war, amidst Bolshevik slogans in favour of land, bread and peace. When the Bolsheviks effectively prevented an attempted coup by the White General Kornilov during this period their prestige immensely improved (Joll, pp 230-231).

The Bolsheviks were well-placed to take advantage of the turns of events. Disciplined organisation and centralized leadership positioned them to rapidly adapt and provide the lead amidst collapsing Tsarism, and for the same reasons they were in a good position to respond as the provisional government floundered in the context of a collapsing state. The Bolshevist professional revolutionaries had preferred to split with their social-democratic rivals rather than have to compromise, a strategy confirmed by the efforts of the Russian secret police to infiltrate the left and “[turn] the energies of the proletariat into harmless activities or at least activities which [they] could control”. The Bolsheviks embraced an insurrectionist revolutionary approach at odds with both reformism and parliamentarianism, and perhaps reminiscent of Blanquism. (Joll, pp 72-73).

In October 1917 the Bolsheviks moved to replace the elected provisional government, seizing power first in Petrograd and then in Moscow. This they justified on the basis of the rapidly shifting mood of the Russian people, as reflected in the ever-greater representation of the Bolsheviks in the workers and soldiers Soviets. At the same time several White armies were formed, backed by the direct intervention of the Entente powers. The consequence of this intervention was a terrible civil war spanning 1917 to 1922, and forcing the hand of the Bolsheviks, to introduce emergency measures that later on were to provide a foundation for the horrors of Stalinism.

Hobsbawm observes of Bolshevik thinking during this period that: ‘The experience of Jacobinism … threw light on the problem of the transitional revolutionary state, including the “dictatorship of the proletariat”’. Hobsbawm also points out that neither Marx nor Engels proposed some universal blueprint for revolution. So it is questionable whether they would have supported subsequent efforts by the Comintern to propose just that (Hobsbawm, 2011, pp 55-56).

Marx himself held that the working class “had to secure itself [even] against its own representatives and officials” in order to avoid “the transformation of the state and
state organs from servants of society into its masters” as had happened in all previous states (Hobsbawm, 2011, p 57).

Such observations resonate very strongly with democratic left critiques of Bolsheivism and even more so Stalinism in view of the consolidation of Stalinism in the years following Lenin’s death.

### Lenin’s *The State and Revolution*

Lenin’s *The State and Revolution* (1917) is a clear statement of his rationale for revolution, though his radical suppositions of the ultimate withering away of the state were disproved by history. It is notable that here he was in tandem both with Marx, and, indeed, with Kautsky and the orthodox or centrist Marxists, the state being seen as being derivative of productive/class relations, and repressive in enforcing those relations (Ashton and Vollraft, pp 86-87). *The State and Revolution* is representative of Bolsheivism’s sharp break with previous social democracy. This break occurred amidst the backdrop of two crucial developments: the First World War, and the October Russian Revolution.

A number of elements stand out in Lenin’s interpretation of Marxism as expressed in *The State and Revolution*. The core of Lenin’s teaching, as with previous Marxism, is the irreconcilability of class antagonisms and the manifestation of those irreconcilable antagonisms with regards to the state apparatus. For Lenin, the state is an instrument of class rule and an instrument of class oppression, as opposed to a means of class reconciliation (Lenin, *Vol 2*, pp 306-307).

Marx had seen the capitalist state’s character as comprising a “national power of capital over labour, of a public force organised for social enslavement, of an engine of class despotism” (Marx in Lenin, *Vol. 2*, p 334). Administrative complexity was seen as an inevitable function of modern societies. However, for Lenin, following Engels, were the state to move beyond its repressive role as the instrument of one class against another, “the end of the state as state” would result (i.e., as a “special repressive force”) (Engels in Lenin *Vol. 2*, pp 313-314). Hence, Marx’s famous withering away of the state – the replacement of politics by the administration of things which can only go with the liquidation of class tensions – achieved specifically by the elimination of class distinctions (Lenin, *Vol. 2*, pp 313-315).

However, because it is assumed the existing bourgeois state power would inevitably be deployed to repress the working class and the socialist movement if left intact Lenin is adamant that:

> Every revolution … [destroys] the state apparatus [and this] clearly demonstrates to us how the ruling class strives to restore the special bodies of
armed men which serve it, and how the oppressed class strives to create a new organisation of this kind, capable of serving not the exploiters but the exploited.

(Lenin, Vol. 2, p 309)

Lenin observes that: “Marx’s idea is that the working class must break up, smash “the ready made state machinery” and not confine itself to merely laying ahold of it.” Lenin’s rhetoric can be contrasted with Kautsky’s vaguer idea of an “energetic shifting of power relations in the State” (Lenin, Vol. 2, p 331; Evans, p 5, Kautsky, 1996, pp 16, 71-72). Lenin is sceptical of Kautsky’s position, accusing him of reducing the conquest of state power to “a simple acquisition of a [parliamentary] majority”. (though Kautsky is arguably more complex than this) Without confronting the question of the state as he suggests, Lenin believes that the matter of revolution simply vanishes (Lenin, Vol. 2, p 394-395).

Yet, the elimination of class distinctions that Lenin strives for is no easy feat. He ridiculed the “Proudhonists” (liberal anarchists) and other “anti-authoritarians” for denying the use of the state to repress the enemies of the revolution. He observes that the bourgeoisie would have no such scruples, and that the “anti-authoritarians” are unrealistic and irresponsible (Lenin, Vol. 2, p 350).

Kautsky might also be considered an anti-authoritarian but not in the sense of imagining that the state can be abolished at one stroke. (Rather in the sense of apparently harbouring universalist liberal values.)

Hence the emphasis of Lenin, following Marx on “the dictatorship of the proletariat”: The period of transition from capitalist to socialist society where the proletarian state represses the bourgeoisie in order to overcome its resistance. As we will see, it was in response to this theme that the divisions between the Bolsheviks and Karl Kautsky became most apparent (Lenin, Vol. 2, p 315). Later, Lenin clarifies, that “the subordination, however, must be to the armed vanguard of all the exploited and working people”. Hence the suggestion made later by both Kautsky and Luxemburg that with the Russian Revolution there was the danger of the democratic proletarian dictatorship morphing into the dictatorship of the Bolshevik Party (Lenin, Vol. 2, p 341).

But instead of the entire working class exercising its democratic dictatorship, Lenin came to be accused of substituting the vanguard party for the very class the Bolshevist communists aimed to liberate. Such criticisms arose both from the relative Right and Left – from Kautsky and from Luxemburg. In time, Bolshevist centralization would narrow the active element even within the party itself: and even if this was intended only as an emergency measure, the conditions were created which were conducive later on to the subsequent rise of Stalinism.
Indeed, Lenin even considered democracy itself as a \textit{form of state} and, so, an instrument for the oppression of one class by another. This is consistent with his idea of a proletarian democratic state as part of a transitional order. Lenin held that such a state is both democratic \textit{and} dictatorial in a new way. So, he was in favour of proletarian democracy but with no illusions as to the possibility of “pure democracy” (i.e., based on universal rights of citizenship), as Trotsky later called it. By contrast, under communism Lenin supposed that “people will become accustomed to observing the elemental conditions of social life \textit{without violence} and \textit{without subordination}”. This is the expressed rationale for the historic split between communism and social democracy (Lenin, \textit{Vol.} 2, p 329, pp 366-368).

As against Kautsky, who saw civil liberties and universal suffrage as the guarantors of future socialism, Lenin truly did suppose existing bourgeois democratic institutions act as a mere safety valve, where formal democracy veils the corruption of those same institutions by wealth. Governments come and go but capital \textit{rules}; and though there is the semblance of change by virtue of universal suffrage, the reality of that rule by capital remains (Lenin, \textit{Vol.} 2, pp 311-312).

Defenders of the Bolsheviks pointed to Lenin’s theoretical and practical adaptation to ‘concrete’ or real-world scenarios (e.g., hunger and war), instead of defending principles of freedom that – while appealing in the abstract – would undoubtedly be difficult to maintain under the circumstances they faced. At the same time critics of the Bolsheviks pointed to the great chasm between socialist principles in abstract theory (e.g., The Bolsheviks’ proclamation of proletarian democracy); and the reality, which, despite an early commitment to working-class participation, was soon to develop into a centralism that severed the consistency between theory and practice (Shandro, pp 218-221; Evans p 11).

Worryingly, Lenin often has stood doubly condemned in the eyes of his critics. \textit{The State and Revolution} is often portrayed as a utopian or even quasi-anarchistic text. Yet, at the same time Lenin is depicted as a cynical, manipulative practitioner of ‘real-politick’. Indeed Lenin was soon to refute any notion that coercion could be done away with in the near future, placing him in stark relief against the anarchists. The critics of Lenin are often so strident and unequivocal in their condemnation of him, as if, somehow, generations of political and even allegedly democratic leaders were not also, somehow, also guilty of manipulation amidst the rationalisations for war and exploitation. In short, criticisms of Lenin sometimes find the mark but the double standards are often blatantly disgraceful. (Evans, p 1, 8, 17-18).

For Leninism, hegemony involves \textit{political leadership} within a \textit{class alliance}, but Mouffe and Laclau contend with regard Leninism – and the specific example of the Russian Revolution – that the class alliance would break down once its common objectives were achieved, that is, because the “identity is constituted around interests which are in the end strictly incompatible” (Mouffe and Laclau, p 55). Hence, they
suggest a non-essentialist critique of the idea of bourgeois tasks, proletarian tasks, etc., with the alternative of articulations that mobilise and reconcile a broader base in the struggle for hegemony.

**Kautsky, a Renegade?**

Towards the end of 1918, Lenin penned *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*. Any semblance of respect for Kautsky was jettisoned in this new work. With Lenin pitching for the loyalty of the world socialist movement, he had to discredit the critic who had previously been widely recognised as the most important authority on Marxism (Lenin, *Vol. 3*, pp 76-77).

Lenin accused Kautsky of recognising “everything in Marxism except revolutionary methods of struggle”. He accused Kautsky of substituting for Marxism a bourgeois liberalism that accommodates only a limited class struggle, while harbouring a universalist liberal rights discourse at odds with the notion of proletarian dictatorship. Hence Kautsky’s democracy was held to have universalist pretensions while failing to recognise the bourgeois character of existing democracies. Kautsky also stands accused of weakness in the face of “social chauvinism” (social-democratic support for the imperialist world war), and “loyalty to Marxism in words and subordination to opportunism in deeds” (Lenin, *Vol. 3*, pp 75-77, pp 87-88). Kautsky, by insisting on a peace, but only without “annexations and [with] no indemnities” was accused of compromising in the face of the logic of imperialism, and hence abandoning the internationalist principle. For Lenin even a purely defensive war can be complicit in the logic of imperialism (Lenin, *Vol. 3*, pp 121-127).

The dictatorship of the proletariat is once more the key theme that makes Lenin’s position distinct from Kautsky’s position. Lenin threw Marx’s own words against Kautsky, accusing him of deceit in his opposition to the proletarian dictatorship, for Kautsky knew Marx “almost by heart”. (Lenin, Vol 3, p 79) The quote Lenin deploys is uncompromising and was found in Marx’s 1875 work, the ‘Critique of the Gotha Programme’, published after Marx’s death. Hence:

> Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. There corresponds to this also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. (Marx in Lenin, *Vol. 3*, p 79)

On this basis Lenin defended the Bolshevik position in the Russian Revolution as furthering this class dictatorship, that is, proletarian democracy; as against Kautsky who opposed democracy to dictatorship as distinct forms of social organisation.
For Lenin this proletarian state was necessary over the long term as bourgeois resistance is not broken easily. Even with the socialisation of property Lenin observed certain residual advantages held by the class. Hence: “money”, “moveable property”, various connections, habits of organisation and management, knowledge of all the “secrets” (customs, methods, means and possibilities) of management, superior education, close connections with the high technical personnel … incomparably greater experience in the art of war … and so forth. (Lenin, Vol. 3, pp 96-97)

Here for Lenin, ‘the suppression of a class means … its exclusion from “democracy”’ (Lenin, Vol. 3, p 94). For Lenin the idea of a pure liberal democracy was ludicrous. In Russia 1918, the time of writing, the Bolsheviks were caught in a civil war, with bourgeois elements calling upon foreign military intervention to preserve their interests – a life and death struggle where calls for universal liberal rights appeared to the Bolsheviks to be absurd (Shandro, pp 221-224).

In conclusion, Lenin had observed Kautsky’s admission from The Road to Power that “Europe [was] heading for decisive battles between capital and labour” and the “old methods” (i.e., bourgeois democracy) were not “sufficient”. Lenin responds by posing the question: “It therefore follows? …” And in response to his own question: “But Kautsky is afraid to think of what follows …” This failure to face facts, according to Lenin, “means becoming a renegade” (Lenin, Vol. 3, p 104).

**Trotsky and the Logic of the Russian Revolution**

In his 1920 work Terrorism and Communism, written amidst the Russian Civil War, Trotsky defends the methods and actions of the Bolsheviks, including terror and militarisation of labour as the product of extreme circumstances. Trotsky refers to “the imperialist slaughter, the civil war and the blockade” as well as the consequent economic disorder, with Soviet Russia having “found itself deprived of coal, oil, metal and cotton” (Trotsky, p 121).

Thus the terror was justified alongside restrictions on the press, and on suffrage, to prevent “conspiracies, sabotage, insurrections, or the calling-in of foreign troops.” For Trotsky these were not abstract concerns or intellectual constructs but a life and death struggle. He also made it his task to refute the centrist position of Kautsky and like-mindeds such as the Austro-Marxists and the Russian left internationalist Menshevik, Martov, whom he sees as obstacles that prevented the crossing-over of the social-democratic parties of Europe to the Bolshevist/communist camp, and as causing vacillation at a critical conjuncture in history. (Trotsky, pp 13, 19, 20-21, 25).

Mouffe and Laclau argue of Trotsky and the Russian Revolution that it “had to justify its strategy by broadening to the maximum the space of indeterminacy characteristic of the struggle for hegemony”, and that Trotsky, as evident in Terrorism and
Communism, employed this approach “to a maximum”. While themselves rejecting essentialist notions of bourgeois and proletarian tasks, they further observe that with a weak and undeveloped Russian bourgeoisie, “the working class [was seen by the Bolsheviks as having] to come out of itself and to take on tasks that were not its own” – so, “a historical terrain where contingency arose from the structural weakness of the bourgeoisie to assume its own tasks” with this becoming “a stepping stone for the seizure of political power by the proletariat”. From this arose Trotsky’s narrative of “permanent revolution” (Mouffe and Laclau, pp 49-50).

Trotsky was sceptical in the face of the strategic conservatism and pessimism of social democracy elsewhere in Europe. In response to Austro-Marxist fears of isolation, starvation and entente intervention, he responded that had a working-class dictatorship been established in Austria “before the maturing of the Hungarian crisis, the overthrow of the Soviet regime in Budapest would have been an infinitely more difficult task”. He also insisted that in the face of intervention the Bolsheviks had “stood firm” (Trotsky, p 17). The implication is that the door to a broader European revolution had been open; but at the crucial moment, the Social Democrats lost their nerve.

By a similar logic, Trotsky held that the Russian army was collapsing anyway and that this justified Brest-Litovsk (the Soviet treaty with Germany that ceded great swathes of land). Hence, he concluded:

In such conditions we had only one way out: to take our stand on the platform of peace, and the inevitable conclusion from the military powerlessness of the revolution, and to transform that watchword into the weapon of revolutionary influence on all the peoples of Europe,. (Trotsky, pp 116)

Like Lenin, the dictatorship of the proletariat was also a crucial theme for Trotsky. Trotsky referred to this as “the transitional period of an exceptional regime”, guided not by “general principles” but “by considerations of revolutionary policy” (i.e., Trotsky believes that the extreme situation demands flexibility in the application of force without the hindrances of a premature or liberal constitution) (Trotsky, p 23). If anything, Trotsky was more openly sceptical of democracy than Lenin. He observed the scenario which he held to be commonplace in existing (bourgeois) democracies:

The capitalist bourgeois calculates: While I have in my hands lands, factories, workshops, banks; while I possess newspapers, universities, schools; while – and this most important of all – I retain control of the army: the apparatus of democracy, however, you reconstruct it, will remain obedient to my will. (Trotsky, p 38)

Therefore, Trotsky concluded that were there really a proletarian parliamentary majority,
the fundamental resistance of the bourgeoisie would ultimately be decided by
such facts as the attitude of the army, the degree to which the workers were
armed, the situation in the neighbouring states; and the civil war would develop
under the pressure of these most real circumstances, and not be the noble
arithmetic of parliamentarism. (Trotsky, p 44)

In response to criticism, Trotsky also repudiated Karl Kautsky’s idea of “milder”
forms of class struggle and revolution, including use of the general strike. Trotsky
responded that such strategies comprised no answer; they “[exhaust] the forces of the
proletariat sooner than those of its enemies, and this, sooner or later, forces the
workers to return to the factories”. Therefore, Trotsky concluded:

Only by breaking the will of the armies forced against it can the revolutionary
class solve the problem of power – the root problem of every revolution.
[Therefore to consolidate power] the proletariat will have not only to be killed,
but also to kill. (Trotsky, pp 26-27)

Furthermore, circumstances left little room to move. Hence Trotsky: “Once having
taken power, it is impossible to accept one set of consequences at will and refuse to
accept others” (Trotsky, pp 97-98). Having seized power and proceeded to “smash”
the bourgeois state the only option was to begin again from the ground up.

There is also the matter of militarisation of labour. Trotsky observed that
militarisation “is only an analogy”; but then there were attempts to justify the use of
compulsion in the formation of industrial armies with military-style discipline.
Capitalist economies, he argued, also involve “very powerful elements of state
regulation and material compulsion” (Trotsky, p 133). And indeed, the Soviet
economy, under pressure from war, blockades, and sabotage verged on collapse.
However, Trotsky admitted the emphasis in Marxian theory of the negation of labour
compulsion, “that under socialism we shall be moved by the feeling of duty, the habit
of working, the attractiveness of labour etc.” Certainly, this is as Kautsky had argued
in earlier works, as opposed to a barracks-like form of labour regimentation. Trotsky
even reaffirmed the withering away of the state, but qualified this by insisting that
“the road to socialism lies through a period of the highest possible intensification of
the principle of the State” (Trotsky, pp 157-159, my emphasis). Under Stalin, this
“highest possible intensification” was to become permanent.

Menshevik critic, Raphael Abramovitch regarded Trotsky’s militarisation of labour as
another form of slavery. In response to the Menshevik line of criticism that
militarisation reduces productivity, Trotsky simply responded, “that is the most pitiful
and worthless liberal prejudice.” Further: “The whole question is: Who applies the
principle of compulsion, over whom, and for what purpose?” (Trotsky, p 135, 157-
159),
For many workers the question of in whose name they performed back-breaking and alienating daily labour would be less important than the ordeal of that labour itself.

Trotsky levelled some parting shots at Kautsky and the Austro-Marxists, whom he held effectively to be one and the same school. The Austro-Marxists had suggested specifically, “the gradual development of the soviets into the social revolution, without an armed rising and a seizure of power”, and that by controlling the repressive apparatus of state, though not going as far as civil war, they could have the benefits of the revolution, without “political storms and economic destruction” (Max Adler in Trotsky, p 170) Trotsky concluded:

Kautskianism as a bourgeois attitude, as a tradition of passivity, as political cowardice, still plays an enormous part in the upper ranks of the working class organisations of the world. (Trotsky, p 175)

Yet Trotsky was driven to concede in June 1921:

Now for the first time we see and feel that we are not so immediately near to the goal, to the conquest of power, to the world revolution. At that time, in 1919, we said to ourselves, “It is a question of months”. Now we say “It is perhaps a question of years”. (Trotsky in Joll, p 261)

The consequence of this isolation and of the brutal struggle for survival that followed was that permanent revolution became permanent terror. Stalin’s terror was to see eight million sent to labour camps and over a million killed (Joll, pp 355-356). Even before this, the terror was to be turned inward against the Bolshevik cadres and leaders themselves. In retrospect, the course of history appears to vindicate Kautsky.

**Kautsky’s The Dictatorship of the Proletariat**

In *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat* (1918) Karl Kautsky provided one of the most important Marxist social-democratic critiques of Bolshevism. His perspective on Russia specifically was one strongly influenced by the Russian Mensheviks and by his friend, Pavel Borisovich Axelrod who, according to Ascher, was “gentle by nature” and inclined “to avoid conflict if at all possible.” For Axelrod there was a struggle in Russia between “elitist” (Bolshevik) and “democratic” organisation (Ascher, pp 94-97). On the Russian Left this was nothing new, and could be traced to the old Menshevist/Bolshevist split in Russian social democracy of 1904.

Kautsky jettisoned the idea of a democratic class dictatorship, instead adopting a more liberal notion of dictatorship as arbitrary rule involving the forcible suppression of rival viewpoints. In opposition to earlier writings in 1899, the way Kautsky posed the
question, democracy and the Bolshevist dictatorship are irreconcilably opposed. That position is given weight by the Bolshevist dismissal of democracy as a form of state (with the assumption that all states are instruments of class repression and class rule). What is more, he had contrasted “class dictatorship” with the (democratic) “class rule of the proletariat”; of which he was in favour of the latter (Kautsky, pp 1-3, Salvadori, p 66). While Kautsky recognised the core position of the dictatorship of the proletariat in Marx’s thought, he held that Marx did not mean dictatorship “in a literal sense”, of rule by “a single person, who is bound by no laws” (Kautsky, 1964, pp 42-43).

Indeed, Mouffe and Laclau claim with quite some justification that in the Russian Revolution “the relations between “vanguard” and “masses” [could not] but have a predominantly external and manipulative character’ (Mouffe and Laclau, p 56).

More specifically, Kautsky made the argument that secret organisation, as opposed to open mass organisation, has the tendency to produce “the dictatorship of a single man, or of a small knot of leaders” (Kautsky, 1964, pp 19-20). Kautsky further raised the cases of Blanqui and Weitling, who saw socialism coming through the rule of “an educated elite”. Kautsky himself held that the organisation and enlightenment of the working class “cannot be adequately done by secret methods”. Secret meetings, for instance, “cannot be a substitute for an extensive Daily Press” (Kautsky, 1964, pp 17-20).

Of note, Kautsky also alluded to the Revolutionary Terror of France in 1783. Hence, he conceded, “dictatorship is better able to wage war than democracy”. However, he also issued a warning: ultimately this terror ended “all proletarian and lower middle-class politics”. This sort of dictatorship, “would necessarily end in the arbitrary rule of a Cromwell or a Napoleon” (Kautsky, 1964, pp 57-58). These words appear prophetic in light of later events. The Russian 1917 October Revolution with its extreme centralization depended of the virtue of the small knot of revolutionaries at the top, in a similar manner to Robespierre and the 1789 French Revolution. However, when the backroom fighter Stalin rose to the top there were not the democratic safeguards against a regime whose oppressiveness would make previous comparable regimes pale in comparison.

Dictatorship in Kautsky’s and Luxemburg’s view also means lack of scrutiny for public policy. Hence Kautsky: “the weaknesses of laws come to light” in a democracy, but “vote by occupation has a tendency to narrow the outlook of the electors”, that is, it nurtures a localised productivist outlook, as opposed to a broad civic outlook) (Kautsky, 1964, pp 77-78).

Lenin and Trotsky were right that Kautsky does not speak specifically of bourgeois democracy in The Dictatorship of the Proletariat, but Kautsky did see democracy as a necessary precondition for socialism. For Kautsky, democracy and socialism were both means to the same end of human liberation, whether that be on the basis of class, gender or race. Indeed, liberty and democracy were ends in themselves and not
merely instrumental in the pursuit of a final goal. Yet, while democracy was possible without industrialisation (he mentions rural peasant communities), industrialisation also formed the necessary material condition for socialism. Hence Marx’s own concept of “revolutionary combination due to association” – from *Manifesto*– (Marx in McLellan, 1988, p 28), arising from the process of industrialisation unleashed by capitalism. Kautsky and his Menshevik correspondents were thus convinced that the will to power of the Bolsheviks was not sufficient to overcome the objectively unfavourable conditions of an industrially backward Russia (Kautsky, 1964, pp 12-13).

While Kautsky did not deny the possibility of the bourgeois state turning against its own democracy should it lose control, this was not enough for him to dismiss democracy as worthless. Democracy developed in the proletariat an attachment to its liberal and democratic rights, and even if those rights were limited, they marked forward steps and inroads into class despotism. Thinking ahead over the long term, over the course of decades, Kautsky apparently assumed that the dependence of bourgeois democracy for its legitimacy on a universal liberal and democratic rights discourse provided a point of leverage for social democracy from which to influence policy; but over the long term to contest even the state itself (Kautsky, 1964, pp 7-9).

Regardless of the limits of bourgeois democracy, as Lenin would call it, Kautsky contended that civil liberties – of press, association, suffrage etc., – also “throw a light” “on the relative strength of parties and classes, and on the mental energy which vitalises them” (Kautsky, 1964, p 35). By preventing premature attempts at revolution, making clear the relative strength of the contending classes, Kautsky argued that the result was more “even and steady” progress towards socialism (Kautsky, 1964, pp 35-36).

Furthermore, Kautsky reaffirmed his distaste for industrial organisation along the lines of a barracks. That, he thought, was not the freedom promised by socialism. Instead, supposing freedom of press, association and suffrage, Kautsky assumed these factors would be conducive to socialist organisation, in which he imagined the “broad masses” of the working class would become involved (Kautsky, 1964, p 51).

Under conditions of liberal democracy, Kautsky suggested: “Parliamentarism, strikes, demonstrations, the Press” with the consequence of “political and economic enlightenment” comprised the means of achieving revolution “by peaceful economic, legal and moral means, instead of by physical force, in all places where democracy has been established” (Kautsky, 1964, pp 37-38).

Kautsky was concerned with the object lesson the Bolshevik revolution would provide for the future; the discrediting of socialism; the conclusion from the revolution’s failure – not that that failure was due to premature conditions, but that no
socialism is possible. Hence Kautsky elaborated further on the object lesson provided by the Bolshevist strategy:

Hitherto Social Democracy did represent to the masses of the people the object lesson of being the most tireless champion of the freedom of all who are oppressed, not merely the wage-earner, but also of women, persecuted religions and races, the Jews, Negroes and Chinese. By this object lesson it has won adherents quite outside the circle of wage-earners. [But] Now as soon as Social Democracy attains to power, this object lesson is to be replaced by one of an opposite character. (Kautsky, 1964, p 90)

It appears that for Kautsky such an object lesson held dire consequences for social democracy, discrediting the social-democratic struggle for suffrage, and civil and industrial liberties, and also more radical goals such as ending exploitation. In the process fuel would be provided for reactionaries who would deny civic rights to social-democratic and communist organisations. Moreover, many workers, and the intelligentsia were increasingly alienated from and disillusioned with the socialist Left, who appeared to them increasingly not to be harbingers of progress and freedom, but of repression and terror.

**Contested Themes in the Kautskyan Third Road**

The most obvious theme in the emerging Kautskyan Third Road is, again, that of dictatorship versus democracy. As already observed, for Kautsky the Bolshevist revolution marked not the dictatorship of a class but of an ever-narrowing base of Bolshevist leaders. Whereas Lenin held the revolution as heralding the democratic dictatorship of the working class and poor peasants, Kautsky saw dictatorship in a more literal sense. Lenin held true to Marx’s formulations on the dictatorship of the proletariat as expressed in his ‘Critique of the Gotha Programme’ in theory. In practice he helped to lay the groundwork for the dictatorship of the party, culminating later in the dictatorship of Stalin. For Lenin and Trotsky such measures were intended to be temporary, arising from desperate circumstances. Under Stalin the terror became permanent.

Kautsky held such developments to be symptomatic of secret, as opposed to open political and industrial organisation, with the Bolsheviks having, admittedly, been driven underground during the world war. While Lenin saw the supposed proletarian dictatorship as a higher form of democracy, Kautsky anticipated the degeneration of the revolution as the leading base became narrower, the decisions and the repression more arbitrary. Whereas Trotsky looked to the Jacobins in the French Revolution as exemplars, Kautsky was correct in gesturing towards the ultimate consequence of the Jacobin strategy: Self-destruction and Napoleonic despotism.
As opposed to the conspiratorial Bolshevist mode of organisation, Kautsky’s teleological outlook supposed inevitable progress to ever higher forms of liberal and finally what we could reasonably call ‘liberal social democracy’. This would, he imagined, under conditions of industrial ripeness provide the basis for entrenched working-class organisation and ever-growing social-democratic consciousness among the workers. The increasing education of the proletariat was supposed to herald the possibility of proletarian administrators in the state apparatus, as opposed to dependence on a hostile bourgeois state bureaucracy (Salvadori, pp 93).

The following, also from his *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, is revealing of his ‘schematic’ view of the process of socialist transition:

The more a State is capitalistic on the one side and democratic on the other, the nearer it is to Socialism. The more its capitalist industry is developed, the higher is its productive power, the greater its riches, the more socially organised its labour, the more numerous its proletariat; and the more democratic a State is; the better trained and organised is its proletariat. (Salvadori, p 96)

Mouffe and Laclau argue that Leninism,

evidently makes no attempt to construct, through struggle, a mass identity not predetermined by any necessary law of history. On the contrary, it holds that there is a “for itself” of the class accessible only to the enlightened vanguard … [And hence there is an] epistemological … privilege granted to the party. [But]: The difference between Kautskyism and Leninism is that for the former the split is purely temporary. (Mouffe and Laclau, pp 58-60)

In response to this, looking back upon history there is something in the idea that a certain kind of social-democratic consciousness was external, at least to much of the European working classes whose everyday experiences led to a trade-union consciousness but not a systemic understanding of capitalism, imperialism and the like. Workers enduring twelve-hour days or worse had little time or opportunity for deep social reflection. The idea that this needed to be remedied with practical, external intervention really was not so outrageous after all.

The consequence of this was that the necessity of this kind of intervention left the realisation of socialism a matter of contingency, *not necessity*. Left on its own the working class would not realise socialism, and the alternative of barbarism – delivered by capitalism’s internal contradictions and antagonisms – was much more likely, hence two world wars and the Great Depression.

While the Marxism of the time had achieved important and accurate insights, that is not to say that the insights provided by other traditions such as social liberalism, for example, were any less valid. Indeed, Marxism’s confidence in its scientific
infallibility resulted in several blind spots, particularly to the rise of fascism, which was not anticipated in the schema of ‘socialist necessity’. Another consequence was wasted opportunities, including by the Kautskyites. For instance there was neglect of the peasantry as a “disintegrating sector”, and hence of the opportunity to build a historic bloc. While Kautsky (and Marx) correctly anticipated capitalism’s trajectory – with the gradual, historic dissolution of the peasantry – the Swedish example later demonstrated that amelioration of their circumstances was also a political opportunity.

Lenin and Kautsky also had radically different ideas on the matter of imperialism. Lenin insisted that violent imperialism – as marked by colonialism and world war for the conquest and exploitation of markets – was “the highest stage of capitalism”. For Lenin this self-destructive process would usher in an epoch of revolutions. However, Kautsky held out the possibility that capitalists unite against these potentially self-destructive tendencies. He even predicted the rise of a “league of states” (like the League of Nations that followed), which would:

[Constitute] the shape of the great empires needed by capitalism to realise its ultimate, highest form, within which the proletariat can assume power. (Kautsky cited in Salvadori, pp 197-199)

Kautsky supposed possible capitalist longevity, in retaining its legitimacy by putting an end to the old ways of imperialism and war, and hence the prospect of global bourgeois “co-ordination” and “an accord between states”, and with “unified international finance capital” organising for “a joint exploitation of the world”. He referred to this potential new phenomenon as “ultra-imperialism” (Meldolesi, pp 1833-1836; Salvadori, pp 189-192). On the other hand, ultra-imperialism would only be possible if the proletariat “helped to defeat the imperialist tendencies” and to defeat “the bloc of national finance capital and militarism within the bourgeoisie” (Salvadori, pp 193).

Almost one hundred years later, though, much of Kautsky’s schema here looks doubtful. Thus, his assumption of peaceful transition – as opposed to the path of insurrection or civil war: Many attempts to achieve peaceful transition have been met with slaughter, and of many thousands in Chile (1973). Austro-Marxism also was to be crushed under the iron heel of fascism. Kautsky himself lived to witness the rise of fascism but had passed away by the time his wife was interned and murdered in a Nazi death camp.

Kautsky’s theory of ultra-imperialism is partly vindicated and partly refuted. The United Nations has arisen as a medium through which great powers attempt to resolve conflicts. War certainly has not stopped but arguably, without multilateral institutions such as the United Nations the threat would be more constant. Further, conflict
usually occurs between proxies, perhaps because the great powers grasp how self-destructive a direct confrontation could be for them.

Further, extensive social-democratic reform was achieved in the course of the twentieth century in Europe, and especially by the Nordic nations. This suggests that one size does not fit all. Kautsky does not provide us with a general schematic that is applicable to all situations, although in his time he thought he had – and so did the Bolsheviks! – but he does point to tendencies and openings under liberal democracy that make change possible, one stronghold at a time. From the perspective of the present there are no teleological guarantees. Kautsky understood the bind of liberal democratic capitalism, and both its virtues and hypocrisies, and also its need for legitimation. Nonetheless, there has been the danger throughout the twentieth and now the twenty-first century of liberal capitalism reverting to either fascism (Nazi Germany) or an authoritarian neo-liberalism no better than fascism (Pinochet).

It is within the realm of reasonable speculation, also, to pose the question of whether Kautsky’s original equivocation in the face of world war was from fear of the iron fist of the imperial German state, not just his fear for self, but for the painstaking construction of social-democratic organisation. Kautsky believed that the German state compared with the Russian state was strong. He was particularly aware of the military and the officer class of Junkers, as well as a “disciplined” state bureaucracy. Hence Kautsky also believed in authoritarian Germany, political strike action would swiftly “become a decisive struggle”, and hence the reservation of this measure for the right time (Salvadori, pp 86-90). Salvadori also notes Kautsky’s perceived “retreat” into a “passive attentisme” (i.e., a wait and see policy) with a “sort of no-mans land between strategy and tactics that could never be crossed in practice” (Salvadori, p 90).

Still, the deeper the traditions of liberty and democracy were entrenched in civil society, and the more necessary they were for purposes of legitimation, the harder they would be to uproot. Crucial here are the traditions, morale, public standing, leadership and consciousness of the armed forces.

The discussion now turns to the contested theme of “pure democracy” versus “proletarian democracy”. The Bolsheviks asked: Democracy for which class? They argued that regardless of who is in government – who governs, under capitalism – the capitalist class rules. This, despite the preferred scenario of growing working-class organisation progressively imposing greater and great limits upon this “absolutism of capital” (Bernstein). This remains so today, and whether through the threat of capital flight and destabilisation; or more directly through the corruption of officials and so forth. However, for Kautsky the bourgeoisie was too small demographically for it to pose any threat by virtue of inclusion in the franchise alone. They perhaps were in the tens of thousands, as against millions. However, Lenin had correctly pointed to enduring bourgeois power as a consequence of networks, education and so forth.
Lenin and Trotsky did not believe in “pure democracy” in any case; but in the midst of a civil war, with foreign intervention and invasion surely such a belief would prove difficult. By contrast, Kautsky appears to have adopted a universal liberal rights discourse.

With Marx, the Bolsheviks rejected the idea of a free people’s state. Hence we have the notion of a free state as against the state as an engine of class despotism (Marx). Yet despite his view that the state comprised an instrument of bourgeois rule and repression, Marx had also considered the possibility of relative state autonomy in his ‘The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte’; and totalitarian states consolidated themselves thoroughly under fascism and Stalinism.

In assessing Kautsky’s enduring legacy it is worthwhile considering the applicability of his analysis in the following decades, and the purpose is to address his position in relation to Lenin’s contention that the state was a bourgeois instrument that had to be smashed.

Across the globe, many variants of capitalist state have emerged, legitimised by liberal, democratic, nationalist and sometimes even religious discourse. This is not necessarily an entirely cynical state of affairs, and can speak to genuine values held by various national bourgeois elites. Although Marx had insisted in Manifesto that the ideas of every epoch are the values of the ruling class (Ideology), these ideas differ from nation to nation. Sometimes they are also held deeply by various working-class elements, and reflect social compromises forged over decades of class struggle (take the examples of Sweden and France) or as in the example of America, as a consequence of founding values and their role in ongoing legitimization and identity. Where liberal, democratic and social rights are crucial for purposes of legitimation, serious inroads can be made into capitalist absolutism, though it is a constant struggle, as the widespread de-coupling of industrial rights from other liberal rights shows. The example of Austro-Marxism has shown that under certain circumstances fascism can gradually cement itself even amidst deep social-democratic consciousness and tradition, and especially where rightist forces hold effective state power.

As against discourses of irreconcilable antagonism, discourses of class compromise and conciliation can also provide the basis of concessions, but in certain guises such an approach can also legitimise the demobilisation of the working class, and accommodate stigma against industrial freedoms. Yet the modern state is itself often contested, and not merely in the form of parliamentarism. While there are problems with the orthodox structuralist framework of Nicos Poulantzas, he touched upon something truly crucial when he described the modern state as a contested field; itself rent through with contradiction (Poulantzas, pp 138-140). Were this not the case, Chavez in Venezuela, for instance, whatever his faults, would never have been able to assume power.
It is worth reconsidering Kautsky in this light. For Kautsky, class antagonisms could not be dissolved but, imaginably, historic compromises one after the other could form a “slow revolution”, as the Austro-Marxists came to call it (Even if Kautsky seems to contradict himself occasionally, arguing sometimes for a relatively rapid shift of power within the stat (the political revolution), for the most part he foresees various instalments of change with great struggles, a process spanning decades.). As opposed to Lenin’s frank call to smash the state apparatus, Kautsky’s idea of an energetic shifting of class relations may appear worryingly vague. Whether through conspiracy (not Kautsky’s or Marx’s chosen path) or through the penetration of liberal and democratic ideology into the apparatus of force itself, the state itself can be marked by internal contradictions, providing openings for change, though a parliamentary majority on its own is not enough to secure qualitative change without penetration and/or transformation of the state apparatus, as well as deeper and broader mobilisation at the level of civil society. Importantly, a parliamentary regime suggests a broader focus than the productivism of a purely Soviet mode of government, and one potentially more conducive to an emphasis on civic rights and responsibilities.

Lenin dismissed parliamentary/representative democracy as little more than “talking shops” (Evans, p 11), but the success of representative democracy depends at least as much on it being complemented by a robust and participatory public sphere and civil society as it does on the specific institutional form it takes. Through a strong and participatory public sphere arises the possibility of social reflection upon the limitations of representative democracy under capitalism, and what might be done to overcome those limitations. All this tends in Kautsky’s favour: That the state need not simply be a class instrument, the totality of which must be utterly smashed to achieve qualitative change.

However, favourable conditions did not exist in revolutionary Russia at the time of the civil war. As noted, Trotsky had pointed to the threat of economic collapse and starvation. In that context of foreign intervention and civil war, and sabotage behind the lines costing scores of lives, desperate circumstances bred desperate measures. As Luxemburg also recognised, the communist movement that followed generally “made a virtue out of [apparent] necessity” (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, pp 308-309). They took the Russian Soviet experience and attempted to apply it as a general model, even to developed liberal bourgeois democracies. Almost wherever ostensibly communist governments arose in the Eastern bloc, the “intensification of the principle of the State” (Trotsky, pp 157-159), which Trotsky had spoken of became seen as a permanent and not merely a transitional affair (though the Stalinists themselves could never bring themselves to rehabilitate Trotsky; and there was some improvement following Stalin’s death). By the time Gorbachev attempted to decisively right the wrongs of Stalinism in the 1980s, it was already too late: There was no independent civil society to provide the basis for resistance to the new oligarchy that established itself in the wake of capitalist restoration, and there was little resistance to the effective capitalist/oligarchic expropriation of the economic infrastructure, which the
Soviet peoples themselves had built up without capitalist involvement over the better part of a century.

For Kautsky the democratic and parliamentary path to socialism was the alternative to founding attempts at socialist transition on violence, terror and conspiracy. For him democracy and socialism were inseparable – they were of the same essence. As Salvadori concludes, Kautsky left “the possibility of a desperate resort to violence to the adversary”. But Salvadori also concludes that because of the very real threat of violent repression, not least of all within imperial Germany itself, that Kautsky held a “pacifist-humanist illusion” (Salvadori, p 39).

Again: Kautsky’s legacy is best assessed in light of the historic lessons that have risen out of experience since his time. Kautsky did not plan for the event of violent oppression, and his faith in the supposedly inevitable triumph of democracy may well have been misplaced. The twentieth century is remarkable precisely in that the totalitarian governments came so close to global domination. Perhaps it is but a historical accident that liberal democracy survived at all. Indeed, perhaps democracy remains resilient only in that it has been so thoroughly integrated (and hence contained) by capitalism. We suppose freedom and popular sovereignty, yet at the same time we recognise the effective veto on public policy by monopoly finance capital. Democratic ideology – when extended beyond the usual narrow confines – is in its essence antagonistic to global monopoly capitalism. Yet democratic ideology is presented as a source of legitimation for capitalist societies amidst an effective ‘double-think’. That is; where few will dare speak the truth that capitalism and democracy are antagonistic towards one another.

However, in response to Salvadori’s conclusions it might also be asserted that Kautsky in his critique of Bolshevism was correct in predicting that extreme methods of terror and labour militarisation were object lessons, which saw socialism discredited in the eyes of millions for generations, and even to the current day. O’Boyle makes the compelling contention that the democratic (Marxist) Left of the turn of the nineteenth century (including Kautsky and the USPD) was remarkable for eschewing authoritarianism and nationalism. He argues that they “would have destroyed the old army and the old governing class” had they enjoyed that power, and that their kind of politics was perhaps the only hope for the Weimar Republic (O’Boyle, p 831). However, extreme punitive reparations and other humiliations enforced upon Germany, including the French occupation of the Ruhr simply entrenched bitterness and resentment amidst its populace.

Kautsky’s reputation never recovered from the Leninist assault. Kolakowski levels the same charge against Kautsky and Lenin, that they were both “professional politicians” and thus manipulative of the working class, partly on account of their shared supposition that socialist consciousness can and should be brought to workers “from the outside” (Kolakowski, p 388). Yet Kolakowski says little about the manipulation
of workers, citizens and their organisations by right-wing forces on the basis of fear, racism and nationalism, and the associated strategies to dissipate class consciousness and internationalism. Robert Michels’ “iron law of oligarchy” is useful to understand the politics of the time in question, and can be applied to the world polity today more than ever (Vandenberg, p 19).

Luxemburg’s Response to the Russian Revolution

Rosa Luxemburg’s essay, ‘The Russian Revolution’, written in the wake of the 1917 Bolshevik October Revolution was a seminal work of criticism, praising the Bolsheviks for their boldness in seizing power and rejecting Kautskyian and Menshevikist cries of unripeness, but also championing democracy and civil liberties. Luxemburg’s perspective on the Russian Revolution comprised a relative Third Road in many respects. Again, the crucial themes at stake were those of dictatorship and democracy, and the proper form of government, and of the state, though Luxemburg differed markedly from the Bolsheviks on the nationalities question, and with regards to their land redistribution policy.

While Kautsky criticised the Bolsheviks from the relative right, breaking with his past uncompromising perspective to ultimately advocate alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie, Luxemburg maintained her libertarian left socialist perspective. While supposing the need for a proletarian dictatorship of some form, it is also notable that Luxemburg did not entertain illusions that the state could be dismantled at a single blow. This, including her appreciation of the conditions of civil war and foreign intervention, distinguished her position from that of other libertarians. (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, pp 308-309)

Notably Luxemburg’s proletarian dictatorship is interpreted as a “manner of applying democracy”, “the dictatorship of the class, not of a party or of a clique” (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, p 298). Unlike the Bolsheviks, Luxemburg seems to perceive more in democracy than a form of state; rather, a broader package including civil liberties, majority rule and even protection of minorities. Here she has common ground with Kautsky and the Mensheviks, whom she otherwise criticises unsparingly. Although she had abandoned the mantle of social democracy in the wake of the Noskes, Eberts and Scheidemanns, with their slavish support for the world war she remained both a democrat and a socialist. Hence Luxemburg summarises the faults in the Bolsheviks’ formulations:

The basic error of the Lenin-Trotsky camp is that they too, just like Kautsky, oppose dictatorship to democracy … [Kautsky] decides in favour of “democracy”, that is, bourgeois democracy … But [Lenin and Trotsky] decide in favour of dictatorship in contradistinction to democracy”. (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, p 307)
So:

We have always distinguished the social kernel from the political form of bourgeois democracy; we have always revealed the hard kernel of social inequality and lack of freedom hidden under the sweet shell of formal equality and freedom – not in order to reject the latter but to spur the working class into not being satisfied with the shell, but rather, by conquering political power, to create a socialist democracy to replace bourgeois democracy – not to eliminate democracy altogether. (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, p 308)

Luxemburg’s Third Road differs markedly from Kautsky in that she always refused alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie, and rejected suggestions that Russia was unripe for revolution by virtue of its limited degree of industrialisation. Yet, while Trotsky supposed the Russian Revolution had to provide impetus to a broader European revolution, despite her earnest desire for peace, Luxemburg feared that a peace treaty between Russia and Germany would actually strengthen German imperialism and thus postpone revolution in Germany (Schurer, pp 356-360). Thus if socialist revolution failed in the European lynchpin of Germany, it would likely – and did – fail in Europe more broadly.

Luxemburg began by recognising the nature of the Bolshevist gambit; the fact the Bolsheviks had staked everything on the international revolution. Furthermore, Luxemburg recognised the extraordinarily unfavourable conditions of imperialist war and civil war, of shortages of basic materials, the failure of like-revolutions to emerge strongly elsewhere in the Continent, of pursuing revolution while “caught in the coils of the most reactionary military power in Europe”. (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, p 283)

She also viewed the split within the revolutionary ranks as having been inevitable – for the liberal bourgeoisie in Russia had never felt comfortable with calls for “peace and land”, and by Luxemburg’s reckoning were already “[seeking] a base of support in the rear and silently to organise a counter-revolution”. The consequence of this was Luxemburg’s consideration of Menshevik aspirations for alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie as “utopian” (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, pp 283-286). Hence she argued in a fashion that Lenin and Trotsky would probably approve,

either the revolution must advance at a rapid, stormy and resolute tempo, break down all barriers with an iron hand and place its goals even farther ahead, or it is quite soon thrown backward behind its feeble point of departure and suppressed by counter-revolution.

Further:
Only a party which knows how to lead, that is, to advance things, wins support in stormy times. (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, p 287)

Thus it was that the Mensheviks, including the resolutely anti-war left internationalists led by Julius Martov were left behind by the Bolsheviks with the assumption of power by the Bolsheviks via the Petrograd Soviet in October 1917. This was not taken by Luxemburg as a legitimate rationale for dissolving the constituent assembly. On the question of parliamentary democracy, Luxemburg acknowledged the arguments of Lenin and Trotsky, that the existing constituent assembly no longer represented the mood of the Russian workers and peasants. Indeed, while the Social Revolutionaries had split not long after the elections, their right wing dominated the assembly. Yet, the “elimination of democracy as such” is not the answer, she argued.

The obvious question was why the Bolsheviks did not simply arrange new elections. Luxemburg also raises the problem of productivism, which was seen all the more so as a flaw in a context of economic collapse that left many former workers without work (Hudis and Anderson, pp 302-304). The reason, it can be reasonably surmised, was that the Bolsheviks dominated the workers’ and soldiers’ Soviets and saw the Soviet path as the surest way of consolidating their hold on state power, indeed, of using the Soviets as the nucleus of a new state.

In opposition to this, Luxemburg contended in a fashion comparable to Kautsky (again, whom she otherwise criticised) that civil liberties are essential in a democracy for purposes of self-correction and scrutiny, which cannot prevail in a context of indiscriminate terror. Thus,

the cumbersome mechanism of democratic institutions…possesses a powerful corrective – namely the living movement of the masses, their unending pressure. And the more democratic the institutions, the livelier and stronger the pulse-beat of the political life of the masses, the more direct and complete is their influence – despite rigid party banners, outgrown tickets etc…. (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, p 302)

Further:

Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinion, life dies out in every public institution, becomes a mere semblance of life, in which only bureaucracy remains the active element. Public life gradually falls asleep, a few dozen party leaders of inexhaustible energy and boundless experience direct and rule … [And hence] a dictatorship to be sure, not the dictatorship of the proletariat, but only the dictatorship of a handful of politicians, that is a dictatorship in the bourgeois sense, in the sense of the rule of the Jacobins. (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, p 307)
Just as under the Jacobins in revolutionary France:

Such conditions must inevitably cause a brutalisation of public life: attempted assassinations, shooting of hostages [and so on] ... Decree, dictatorial force of the factory overseer, draconic penalties, rule by terror – all these things are but palliatives ... It is rule by terror which demoralises. (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, pp 306-307)

Luxemburg (writing in 1918) saw these Bolshevist tactics as traditionally being “weapons in the hands of the ruling classes” as opposed to a proletariat that “abominate[s] murder”, and which “fights institutions, not individuals”. For her the revolution was not “a desperate attempt of a minority to shape the world by violence according to its own ideals”, but a mass movement of the great majority which in the end could not fail but to “make historical necessity into historical reality” (Luxemburg in Schurer, pp 368-369).

While Trotsky came to suppose people’s inherent laziness (that “as a general rule, man strives to avoid labour” (Trotsky, pp 125-127), arguing thus for the militarisation of labour (which Kautsky would have condemned as “barracks socialism”), Luxemburg looked forward to a change in the root motivations of humanity. On this issue she was like Kautsky, in rejecting authoritarianism in factory management (Schurer, p 369). For her state power was the means to something greater, not the end in itself (which arguably it became under Stalin, unrecognisable as a socialist project in the spirit of Marx to set humanity free, not burden it under a regime of relentless and all-pervasive terror). Hence, in ‘The Russian Revolution’ Luxemburg argued:

Socialism in life demands a complete spiritual transformation in the masses degraded by centuries of bourgeois class rule. Social instincts in place of egotistical ones, mass initiative in place of inertia, idealism which conquers all suffering… . (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, pp 306-307)

In summary, in ‘The Russian Revolution’ a number of themes were made apparent. There are conflicting interpretations (between Luxemburg and the Bolsheviks) on the nature of the state, and of democracy and of dictatorship. As against Lenin, Luxemburg appears to posit democracy as a practice rather than a form of state; and also seems to reject the notion of the state as necessarily, exclusively and narrowly comprising an instrument of class rule. Hence, Luxemburg’s democracy is participatory, and not only narrowly representative, and by virtue of that broad participation hers is no intolerant majoritarianism either. Here there is room for both representative institutions, including a backbone of Soviets (workers’ councils), but this must be edified by a vibrant and participatory democratic sphere (Ashton and Vollraft, pp 102-107).
That said, she was under no illusions as to the nature of the bourgeois state, or of the limits of bourgeois democracy. At the same time, for Luxemburg liberty and democracy were more than legitimising slogans beyond which lay the absolutism of capital. Liberty and democracy were valuable in of themselves, especially when extended beyond the framework of bourgeois democracy, and especially with the prospect of the masses themselves partaking deeply of public life.

Her accusation that the Bolsheviks were adopting the dictatorship in the bourgeois sense – in the tradition of the bourgeois Jacobins – is very telling. Much as the Jacobins turned on their own, and Robespierre himself was sent to the guillotine, the Bolsheviks’ tactics led ultimately to their own destruction, with the cynical backroom infighter, Stalin, rising to absolute power over the corpses of his former comrades. Indeed, Kathy Ferguson accuses Lenin (contra-Luxemburg) of not recognising the difference between education and manipulation; here, “class consciousness [is reduced to] willingness … to follow the commands of the Party” (Ferguson, p 528).

Bertram Wolfe, an authority on Luxemburg, notes that she was anything but naïve. A temporary dictatorship might be necessary to defend the “new order” as it struggled against external and internal threats, but at best a selectively repressive proletarian dictatorship was a “necessary evil” (but an evil nonetheless). It was to be dispensed with as swiftly as was practicably possible, and ought to comprise the democratic dictatorship of the organised working class (i.e., not the dictatorship of a clique; maintained by terror and ultimately turning inwards on itself as well as broader society). For this reason, Wolfe questions the adoption of Rosa Luxemburg by Leninists (Wolfe, pp 214, 218, 224-225).

As Luxemburg also understood, attempts to universalise the Leninist model of tactics, forced upon the Bolsheviks “by disastrous conditions” would comprise a retrograde step. Even she did not really foresee the extent of the degeneration that would occur under Stalin and the tragic destruction of the nexus between socialism, democracy and freedom in the eyes of much of the proletariat in the Western world (Luxemburg in Schurer, pp 370-371).

Despite his obvious dislike for the Bolsheviks, Kolakowski accused Luxemburg of being unrealistic when compared with them, the consequence of her “mythical, unshakeable” belief that the masses would fulfil their historic mission (Kolakowski, p 424). In response, again, there was the option of sustained dual power, of Soviets and a Red Army – as an insurance policy – co-existing with the constituent assembly. That might have been a risk, but Kautsky and Martov were also correct in anticipating the damage done to the cause of socialism through desperate, authoritarian and terroristic strategies.
Austro-Marxism in Practice through Peace, Revolution and War

The Austro-Marxist experience during this time of revolutionary upheaval is also important in considering its place as a Third Road or relative Third Way. From 1914 the Austro-Marxists were divided on the question of World War I. While an Independents faction opposed the war steadfastly, Renner was accused of “social patriotism” for his insistence on support the war effort to “maintain Austria’s territorial integrity and multi-national structure” (Lesor, p 119). In 1915 elements of the socialist parties of Europe gathered together at the Zimmerwald Conference in Switzerland to discuss ways and means to peace. Lesor observes that:

While the entire Zimmerwald Congress was united in its repudiation of “social patriotism” and the various party leaderships support the war, its right wing, to which Friedrich Adler and the other left-wing Austro-Marxists belonged, dissociated itself from the Bolsheviks whom under Lenin’s leadership, had begun to use the congress as a slipway for the launching of a communist international. [They were] … branded as Kautskyist and consequently rejected. (Lesor, p 121)

Further peace conferences were organised by the European Left as the war progressed, but these were failures in the sense they had no impact on the policies of the warring parties. To illustrate the degree of the anti-war activists’ initial isolation, it is well to note Anson Rabinbach’s observation that the Austrian anti-war group only comprised some 120 party members in 1915. In desperation on 16 October 1916 Austro-Marxist Friedrich Adler assassinated Count Sturgkh, the imperial minister-president, but by the time of his trial in 1917, what Rabinbach refers to as “war euphoria” was subsiding, and the reality of the war was sinking in. Hence by 1917 Adler had “enormous support”. Rather than facing execution, ultimately Adler was to be released with the Austrian revolution (Rabinbach, pp 18-19).

Through 1918, Austria-Hungary edged ever closer to collapse under the pressure of the war. In that context, the socialists attempted to promote a compromise based on their Brunn programme, which had promoted a federalist solution to reconciling the country’s various nationalities, but by October it was too late. The monarchy collapsed and a much-diminished Austrian Republic emerged in November 1918 (Rabinbach, p 20). Loew argues that at this point, “the Social-Democrat Party was the only relevant political force in the residual regions that called itself German Austria.” Hence their assumption of power (Loew, p 25).

Eric Hobsbawm makes the observation that during the revolution:
the Social Democrats were radical, militant, anxious to provide a link between the Second and Third Internationals, and any case rejected the sort of social democracy which defined itself essentially as an anti-Bolshevik force. They saw themselves as revolutionaries (Hobsbawm in Duczynska, p 23).

Despite this, the response of the Austrian socialists was clearly defined as against the Bolshevik strategy. Fearing Entente military intervention, as well as starvation in the context of a civil war where fortified Conservative forces controlled the countryside, the Austro-Marxist response was to restrain and discipline the revolutionary movement from premature and risky strategies, while consolidating their own power in the socialist-dominated Volkswehr (the new republican people’s army, comprised of war veterans). In any case, the Austrian socialists presumed that the unviable new Austrian state could not survive with a population of only 6.5 million, and lacking key resources and industry. Hence, there was the optimistic assumption of a political union with a stronger democratic socialist Germany. Instead, the German Social Democrats chose the path of collaboration with the militarist old guard. Moreover, the path to German-Austrian unification was blocked under the peace terms demanded by the victorious Entente powers (Rabinbach, pp 20-22, 25).

Rabinbach further observes (importantly, in light of Bauer’s position): “The German-Austrian provinces were not economically self-sufficient since crucial resources were located in the successor states”, and “agricultural production was less than 50 per cent of 1913 levels” (Rabinbach, p 21). Yet despite the Austro-Marxists’ intent, ‘to keep the masses away from “revolutionary adventures”’, Loew argues that “the 500,000 agricultural labourers … were extremely radicalised … and numerically the second largest proletarian group” (Loew, p 29). This suggests a stronger proletariat in the countryside than Bauer supposed and perhaps greater leverage in negotiations with the forces of Austrian conservatism.

Workers councils had been formed and Austria-Hungary stood at the crossroads, but the Austrian Social Democrats chose the path of strategic conservatism. Arguably these councils could have confronted the existing order head-on. However, fearing that such confrontation could lead to civil war the mainstream Austrian Social Democrats sought to lead these emerging bodies in order to defuse the councils’ immediate revolutionary potential (Duczynska, pp 28-29).

During the revolutionary period, though, various strategies emerged within the socialist camp for the democratic socialisation of industry. As Rabinbach explains Otto Bauer’s programme envisaged “step by step” socialisation, beginning with “the large coal, iron and steel plants”. Increasingly there would emerge “co-operative venture[s] divided between labour, capital, consumers, and the state”. It was assumed that the entire process would take decades.
Max Adler was more radical, seeing a greater role for the factory councils, with “democratisation of the administration from below, as well as an institution parallel to parliament” (i.e., dual power). The workers’ councils specifically would enjoy a right of veto; would help appoint the government in conjunction with a two-chamber parliament elected under conditions of universal suffrage; and would act as an organ for socialisation of the economy. The councils would also play a leading role in socialist education. In this way, Adler supposed a compromise could be reached that would avoid civil war; but which would develop into a popular and democratic proletarian dictatorship during a process of transition. Under such circumstances, the breaking up of the old bourgeois state was also assumed. However, the “passing of the revolutionary crisis” and consolidation of conservative hegemony outside Vienna meant these plans came almost to nothing. Hence, the democratic political revolution was never completed, setting the stage for the social-democratic retreat and the failed insurrection (in defence of democracy) in the years 1927-1934 (Rabinbach, pp 24-25; Loew, pp 31-34).

The Austro-Marxists faced heavy criticism from the Bolshevists for their apparently passive and conservative management of the post-World War I revolution in their own country. The Bolsheviks went so far as to suggest the failure of the Austro-Marxists to seize power properly contributed to the fall of the communist government in Hungary, further isolating the revolutionaries in Russia and Germany. The position of social democracy in post-war revolutionary Austria was further complicated by a hostile peasantry, which was opposed to requisitioning of their harvest. Without compromise, the agrarian and industrial regions would be pitted against each other. Without the support of the kind of international socialist community proposed by Bauer, where the position of a small nation-state could be made viable by specialising in the international division of labour, Austria was fatally weakened.

It can be noted that the Austro-Marxists were strategically conservative at the time of the Russian Revolution, even if they were not so in their final aims and their values. The Bolsheviks may have stood firm, but the desperate nature of the struggle lead to increasingly indiscriminate terror, the demoralisation of the working class, and consequently with the rise of Stalinism. The fate of Hungary demonstrated that the threat of invasion was real, even though the victorious entente powers were fearful that in suppressing proletarian revolutions they could spark dissent and perhaps even revolution at home, and France and Italy opposed any such intervention at Versailles (Loew, pp 25-27).

Ilona Duczynska contends that “the formation of a block of revolutionary states might have been possible” and,

German-Austria, with its very considerable stocks of armaments, could have been the bridge between the two Councils’ Republics: the Barvarian and the
Hungarian, which were struggling valiantly at the very borders of Austria, but in isolation. (Duczynska, pp 40-41)

Perhaps the Austro-Marxists could have striven for a more robust ongoing strategy of dual power. Here the councils could play a constructive and empowering role. Yet the crucial question was that of who held the state power, and that entailed much more than a merely settling a parliamentary majority.

With the ultimate rise of fascism in Austria, in the end social-democratic paramilitary organisations were not strong enough to see off the threat. There were many reasons for this, which we will consider later, but had the Austro-Marxists’ maintained a stronger foothold in the armed forces during the revolutionary period and afterwards that could well have altered the course of European history. Loew writes of the Austrian armed forces during this period that:

The backbone of the Volkswehr … was provided by the Social-Democratic soldiers representatives in the Habsburg Army … Its social composition was proletarian through and through, and the soldiers were socialist or communist in their politics. (Loew, p 30)

Later years saw a purging of the republican army, “of its Social Democratic founders” “and the occupation of all key positions by conservative elements”. Hence, the army turned against the Social Democrats in 1934. Arguably, from their initial position of strength the Social Democrats should never have allowed this to happen. Even though they surrendered control of parliament to the Christian Socials with the 1920 elections, assuming that a parliamentary majority was but a matter of time – widespread and ongoing representation in the republic’s armed forces should have been the “bottom line” underscoring that compromise (Loew, p 35). Guarantees of constitutional and liberal democracy would prove empty in the face of an authoritarian, and ultimately, fascist state.

In a 1920 pamphlet, Otto Bauer went so far as to argue “for a proletarian dictatorship” “and possibly even a Red Terror, should the capitalist class prevent a Social-Democratic parliamentary majority from governing”. Hence, Bauer argued: “The working class … must remain armed.” This position was adopted “systematically” at the “Linz congress of 1926”. The programme also called for “ensuring the republican character of the armed forces”. Again, failure to uphold this principle would later prove costly (Loew, pp 38-39).

During the revolutionary period, the Austro-Marxists pursued a strategy of alliance – for the sake of national unity and civic peace – with the conservative ‘Christian Socials’. Yet the Austrian Conservatives were later to turn on their social-democratic partners; forming their own paramilitary organisations; suppressing the social-democratic paramilitary Schutzbund, and backing the rise of a pro-clerical fascist
regime under Dolfuss (Lesor, pp 121-129; Loew, pp 25-27, 30). Lesor observes that
the compromise agreed to by the Austrian Social Democrats carried the seeds of this
outcome as it excluded their presence in the army, the police and various ministries
(Lesor, p 128). The intervention of the Austrian army in the later civil war, on the side
of the right-wing Heimwehr, was to prove decisive. There were gains from the
compromise, however, including,

the eight-hour day, paid holidays for workers, the banning or drastic reduction
of child labour and night work for women, new enlightened regulations
concerning outworkers, the extension of the scope and authority of the factory
inspectorate, as well as the passing of fundamental social legislation
establishing a comprehensive system of health and unemployment insurance.
(Lesor, p 124)

Crucial in the development of an Austro-Marxist Third Road, Bauer explains how
Austrian social democracy, confronted with limited options, instead sought for the
proletariat ‘strong and permanent positions in the state and in the factories, in the
barracks and in the schools: a “functional democracy” in addition to “merely political
democracy”’ (Bauer in Bottomore, pp 163, 167). In substance “functional democracy”
required that “the government in each branch of its activity should remain in constant
touch with the citizens directly affected by this branch of government, organised
according to their work places or their social and economic function” (Bauer in
Bottomore, p 167). This sat well with the Austro-Marxist view of transition;
specifically, Otto Bauer’s conception of the “slow revolution”, according to which the
conquest of power by the working class had to be accompanied by a gradual, patient
construction of socialist institutions; effectively “revolutionary reforms”, but
animated by an underlying class struggle (Bottomore, pp 39, 42).

While Bottomore sees Austro-Marxists as opposing any “dictatorship of the
proletariat” (Bottomore, p 39), this appears to follow from the Kautskyan
interpretation in his polemic with Lenin, and in the sense employed by Otto Bauer
who argued in 1936 that the term had come to mean “something entirely different
from what was originally conceived” (Bauer in Bottomore, p 201).

Lesor notes how most of the socialist parties not falling into the Bolshevik camp
resolved to resume the Second International, and yet Austrian social democracy did
not agree with the preconditions for Comintern membership. Nor could it support a
position of “social patriotism”. Therefore, they formed their own International in
1920, the ‘Arbeitsgemeinschaft Sozialistischer Parteien’ ‘for which Karl Radek
coined the irreverent appellation “Two and a Half International”’. At one time this
body included “the French Partei Socialiste, the German USPD, the British
Independent Labour Party (ILP), the Russian Mensheviks and the Swiss Social
Democratic Party”. (Loew, pp 47-48)
To summarise, the Two and a Half International and Austro-Marxists sought reunification of social-democratic and communist forces in a “higher synthesis” (Loew, pp 50-51):

The right social-democrats wanted to tie the workers of the entire world to parliamentary methods of struggle, while the left social-democratic forces wanted to allow Bolshevik tactics as a method of struggle appropriate to particular Russian conditions. (Loew, p 48)

Victor Adler declared at its founding conference:

You must bear in mind all possibilities, you must not tie yourselves in sectarian fashion to one slogan or the other. The question of democracy or dictatorship is a question that is determined by the historical moment: not just by the will of the proletariat, but rather by the entire sum of relations that are imposed on the proletariat by the inherent force of development itself. (Loew, p 48)

However, the Vienna International “did not prove viable” and the dissenters re-joined the Second International in 1923 (Lesor, p 121, Loew pp 47-48). Friedrich Adler specifically was associated with the formation of this so-called Two and a Half, or Vienna International, which attempted to mediate between and reunite what came to be a reformist Second International, and the communist (later Stalinist) Third International (Bottomore, p 1). Although in this mission they ultimately failed, their example helped inspire later movements such as the Eurocommunism and the New Left. Hence, even this early, Austrian social democracy was building a genuine Third Road distinct from Bolshevism and mainstream social democracy. Indeed, Austrian social democracy, in the form of Bauer’s slow revolution, seemed poised for the kind of long war of position envisaged by Gramsci.

In terms of legislation, after World War I when “the balance of power between social classes … favoured the socialists”, the Austrian Social Democrats introduced bold social measures. As well as those gains already mentioned as a consequence of the class compromise, Austrian social-democratic legislative gains included “hours of work, conditions of employment, works councils, health and “education and housing”. In Vienna, especially, they fought for and achieved “working class housing, health and welfare services”, as well as “cultural facilities” and “educational reforms”. In Bottomore’s opinion, for a time these achievements made Vienna “a showcase of social democracy” (Bottomore p 38).

These notable programmes and reforms were funded within Vienna via a radically progressive regime of taxation. There were “direct taxes on property, employers, all luxuries, high rents, and real estate”. In consequence, more than 61,175 new workers’ apartments were built, “with parks, swimming areas, schools, kindergartens, gymnasia, health facilities, and community centres” (Rabinbach, p 28).
Anson Rabinbach observes: “By 1924 the city of Vienna, which had 1.8 million residents, had 266,415 Socialist Party members, one of every five adults.” In Rabinbach’s words, the Austrian socialists “created their own public sphere”, involving a daily press, “party clubs and taverns”, etc., and educational reform saw the promotion of “democratic values” and “social mobility without regard for class or sex”. Meanwhile, adult education programmes were developed to supplement the party libraries, bookstores and other cultural agencies. Their strategy was one of ‘gradual “hineinwachsen” (growth from within)’, which, as Rabinbach explains, assumed the growth of capitalism and thus of the working class,

necessarily [entailing] a displacement of political considerations to the future, when the necessary conditions [prevailed] thus leaving to the present the task of the intellectual and spiritual preparation for power. (Rabinbach, pp 27-30).

This was a base that the Austro-Marxists imagined they could build upon in the future, on the assumption that the world socialist movement would ultimately grow and prosper and lend support to a diminished Austria. Yet, at the end the broader context of geographic, economic (and hence political) containment contributed to the Austro-Marxists’ marginalisation; and accounted for the effective relegation for many in the mainstream of socialist and Marxist theory to “a footnote of history”.

A reappraisal, however (which is dealt with briefly in this thesis) unearths a movement of historic significance and of theoretical significance even today. Bottomore notes how after the First World War the Austro-Marxist school,

lost some of its coherence, and also its dynamism, as a distinct intellectual orientation, while as a political doctrine it became more clearly divided between right-wing and left-wing tendencies. (Bottomore, p 14)

Nevertheless, Austrian social democracy was to maintain its organisational unity. The same practical considerations that made proletarian dictatorship unviable in post-war Austria also contributed to a sense that nothing could be gained in dividing the movement.

**Conflicting Themes for Austro-Marxism during the 1914-1925 Period**

A number of conflicting themes negotiated by the Austro-Marxists bear on the period covered by this chapter. As we have seen, in the pre-revolutionary period the most important issues faced by the Austrian socialists were those of war and peace, nationalism and internationalism. This saw the movement divided along ethnic lines, even though before the war there was a preference for a federalist compromise for
Austria-Hungary. It could be argued that the dignity and soul of Austrian socialism was saved by the likes of Friedrich Adler and Otto Bauer, who stood for the cause of peace. With the revolution, however, at least within the Austrian “rump republic”, there was no organisational split along reformist/communist lines. The Austro-Marxists attempted to apply this principle to the broader international movement, but failed.

Mostly notable, therefore, is the specific Austro-Marxist negotiation of the theme of reform versus revolution. Under exceptionally unfavourable circumstances the Austrian socialists embarked on a revolutionary and, yet, strategically conservative strategy. While the Bolsheviks were to win total state power in an aggressive but risky gambit, which led to civil war, the Austrian socialists compromised, ensuring civil peace for many years.

The Bolsheviks saw weakness and a failure of international solidarity in the Austro-Marxists’ strategic conservatism. Their tactic of appealing to the peasants’ land-hunger bore fruit for them. Could a similar approach have succeeded in revolutionary Austria? It will never be known whether or not a broader European revolution would have had a chance at success were its democratic socialist parties more ambitious and uncompromising. In any case, the Austro-Marxists were mostly untarnished by the kind of post-war collaboration with the militarist old guard, which included wholesale murder of revolutionaries, as in the case of German social democracy. Rather, the Austro-Marxists retained the spirit of the old Second International. Austro-Marxists had refuted Kautskyan philosophical materialism but they shared with Kautsky and the short-lived German Independent Social Democrats (USPD) a vision of qualitative, but gradual and relatively peaceful transition.

As has been discussed, within Austro-Marxism there were also those who favoured a more ambitious agenda, of dual power, and including an ongoing role for the workers’ councils (e.g., Max Adler). Bauer, meanwhile, preferred a radical but gradualist strategy (i.e., over decades) of industrial socialisation. As events unfolded, it is reasonable to suggest a more ambitious dual-power strategy might have provided a bulwark against fascism. Then again, it could have also precipitated an earlier civil war. The gradualist Austrian socialist strategy, consolidating their base in Vienna via cultural institutions and a truly ambitious and radical programme of municipal reform bore fruit for some time, and provided an inspiration and an example for later generations of democratic socialists.

The year 1918 had provided the opportunity for a transformed constitution and state apparatus conducive to social democracy and protective against any reversion to an authoritarian state power. Arguably, a more robust compromise – a more robust political revolution – could have been won, helping to block the path to fascism in later years. Universal suffrage on its own was not enough, was not fully secure so
long as the state power itself was not firmly in the hands of democratic forces. In that regard, at the least, the revolution was a wasted opportunity.

The discussion in Chapter Eight further considers the substance of the Austro-Marxists’ efforts.
Chapter Eight:

Austro-Marxism, 1925-1934

The chapter begins by extending the discussion of Austro-Marxism in the last chapter through to the period 1925-1934. Of interest are the cultural and social policies and strategies in Red Vienna, as well as the sources of crisis and decline that first emerged strongly from 1917 and culminated in a brief civil war in February 1934. Considered in detail are the specific ways in which Austro-Marxism comprised a relative Third Road during this period. The chapter concerns some of the most important Austro-Marxist writings, by Otto Bauer and Max Adler, on the nature of fascism and the best response from the organised working class. Finally, the chapter considers important and often conflicting themes in Austro-Marxism, which leads into an account of its most important legacies from the 1925-1938 period.

The Historical Background to Austro-Marxism

The period 1925-1934 is notable for several reasons as far as the writings and activism of Austrian social democrats are concerned. It saw the rise of fascism across Europe, especially in Italy, Germany and Austria. Soon thereafter fascism was to arise also in Spain with Franco, backed by Hitler, over-running the Republican government. The period was also notable as it heralded the Great Depression, which fuelled the growth of both fascist and communist movements in Europe. Much of Austria-Hungary’s populace had been made up of minorities: Czechs, Slovaks, Slovenes, Croats, Northern Italians and others who were released into states of their own with the close of World War I. With union with Germany forbidden after the war, the small rump Austrian Republic found itself in a tenuous position.

Nonetheless, the Austrian social democrats must have felt themselves in a somewhat strong position. The Austro-Hungarian working class had been exhausted to the point of rebellion, a rebellion fuelled by “hunger bordering on starvation”; physical “exhaustion” with the extension of the working day; and with those workers “abused and trapped between war profiteers, black marketers” and officers who retained their access to luxuries even despite the general deprivation. Thus it was that in the Spring of 1917 a wave of mass strikes broke out (Gruber, 1983, p 55). Having maintained cells within the Austro-Hungarian army, when revolution came they were in a position to dominate the Volkswehr (people’s army) that emerged from out of the chaos. Otto Bauer himself noted that the survival of the trade unions also provided an
important kernel from which new social organisation was to emerge. (Duczynska, pp 30-32; Bauer in Duczynska, p 35).

Later, the Social Democrats maintained their own paramilitary army, the Schutzbund, with the consequence of effective dual power. Indeed, dual power was the Social Democrats’ defensive “insurance policy” to protect the democratic path to socialism represented in the republic. They were to make steady electoral gains, but as will become evident, this period was marked by crisis and a kind of slow decline as far as the actual force of physical power underscoring Austrian social democracy was concerned – including the rise of an indigenous Austrofascism and ultimately the Anschluss with Nazi Germany in 1938. As Ilona Dunczynska especially recalls, the “political advantages” of the defensive approach “were gradually whittled away, until the defensive utterly failed to defend” (Dunczynska, p 41).

Until 1927, the Austro-Marxists felt confident that their institutional strategy would bear fruit for them, preparing the working class for the ultimate democratic seizure of power that would come with the global development of capitalism and the consequent socialisation of the means of production.

The Austro-Marxist strategy included the development of social and cultural societies, associations and institutions, including extensive public-housing projects. Steeply progressive taxes within Vienna specifically provided for education services, childcare, libraries, health care, playgrounds, gymnasiums, swimming and wading pools, meeting halls, youth facilities, carpentry shops, post offices, cafes, lectures, music programmes, symphony orchestras, choral societies and more. Furthermore, this institutional strategy facilitated “an atmosphere of co-operation and solidarity” among the Viennese working class (Rabinbach, p 63; Gruber, 1983, pp 52-53, p 57).

Max Adler, writing in 1924, had argued in favour of cultural work to prepare for the development of “the new socialist man”; effectively a strategy of Kulturkampf (culture war). The strategy was to be extended to a broad base as well, making scholarship available through “adult education”, “the Catholic worker youth”, “the high schools” the “teachers’ colleges”, and the various “cultural organisations of the working class movement”. One aim was to highlight the role of the underprivileged masses in shaping history; and thus to impart confidence to the working class (Gruber, 1983, pp 60-62).

Rabinbach importantly notes: ‘The educational structure [created by the Austro-Marxists in Vienna] was … called upon to provide an effective antidote for the “iron law of oligarchy”’ (Michels); with the aim of developing a spirit of (Max Adler) “codetermination and responsibility” (Rabinbach, p 65).

Meanwhile “proletarian rituals” such as May Day – mobilising hundreds of thousands – promoted a sense of “confident class self-hood”. Yet even though the public base of
support for Austrian social democracy was strong (indeed growing), the balance of power was shifting within the state apparatus of force. This, in combination with the weakening of the Schutzbund as a credible deterrent to protect democracy, eroded the position of Austrian social democracy. The Depression was to further weaken the strategic position of the organised working class as a consequence of a large “reserve army of labour” (Gruber, 1983, pp 56-57).

Nonetheless, despite their passion for democracy, and for a mass party in contradistinction from Bolshevism, Gruber observes that in reality the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SDAP), as it ultimately developed, was driven from above. Gruber contends that in reality “a stable oligarchy dominated the pyramidal organisational structure and warded off factions or grass-roots initiatives which challenged its supremacy” (Gruber, 1991, p 7), but with the elections of 21 April 1927, the Austrian Social Democrats must surely have felt vindicated. They won “71 out of 165 parliamentary seats”, with an increase in their vote by 120,000 (to 600,000) in their Red Vienna stronghold (i.e., they managed a two-thirds majority in the Vienna municipal council) (Rabinbach, p 32).

Austro-Marxist strategy at this time was also well represented in the party’s Linz Programme of 1926. Understandably, the programme called for the education of “the police, gendarmerie, and soldiers to loyalty to the Republic”. Under the Linz Programme, resorting to the Schutzbund (the social-democratic paramilitary organisation) was only to be used as a defensive measure. The republican Schutzbund had been formed in 1923 in recognition of the vulnerability of Red Vienna and the possibility of having to defend “the democratic path to socialism” by force (Rabinbach, pp 30, 46-57). To be specific, this programme held that the SDAP:

must promote the closest possible community of spirit between the workers and the soldiers of the federal army who, together with all the other armed forces in the state, must be taught loyalty to the Republic … Should, however, despite every effort of the Social Democratic Workers’ Party, a counter-revolution succeed in breaking up democracy, then the working class could no longer gain power in the state by means other than civil war. (Duczynska, pp 68-69)

Raimond Loew reflects on how only months later, Austrian social democracy was put on the defensive. When an invalid and a child were murdered by three “members of the fascist veterans’ association”, a general strike and riots broke out. The Palace of Justice was also set fire to, and the ensuing brutal state crackdown saw “86 deaths and 1,100 injuries” (Loew, p 40). The social-democratic leadership, earnest in avoiding civil war, held back the Schutzbund paramilitaries but with a consequent demoralisation among the workers. Faced with rising fascist paramilitaries and an increasingly hostile state, Gruber views the Austro-Marxist response as a retreat into their cultural strategy, as “a surrogate for politics”. The year 1927, therefore, marked the beginning of the end, with steady dissolution of any “balance of class forces”, and
with reactionary elements increasingly adopting an aggressive posture (Gruber, 1991, p 10).

Instead of fighting, the Social Democrats proposed a “government of reconciliation”. However, this was refused by the Conservatives who preferred to work with the fascist, paramilitary Heimwehr organisation. Loew concludes that the consequence of this was that “the bourgeoisie now knew that it could go a long way without having to fear the full power of the Social Democrats being brought against it” (Gruber, 1991, p 41). Bauer thereafter decided upon another tactical retreat, backing down on the proclamation of a general strike, including the transport workers’ strike; once again for fear of civil war. Importantly, this back-down was without the later threat of external intervention by Nazi Germany, which arose from 1933, and also motivated the Austro-Marxists in their desire to avoid the trigger of a final confrontation (Rabinbach, p 49).

During the period 1928 to 1930, though, social-democratic fortunes actually continued to climb in subsequent municipal and general elections, and party membership swelled to well over 700,000. However, Otto Bauer conceded in 1929 that “in the same degree as our mental power has grown among the people of German Austria, so has the balance of physical force shifted in favour of our opponents” (Loew; Rabinbach, p 41). The right-wing clericals had shown their willingness to use violence to defend their interests (Rabinbach, p 33). In a costly blunder, the Social Democrats had also given up their control of the Vienna Arsenal in 1927, and government forces confiscated thousands of weapons. Ilona Duczynska concludes that ultimately, the SDAP “forfeited the credibility of its will to resist” and a series of offensives by the reactionaries “[were] not long in coming” (Duczynska, pp 75-77).

The Great Depression further undermined the Social Democrats’ position. Unemployment spiralled high even in the period of recovery, 1925-1930; and the Depression affected one third of the labour force. By 1933, “the staggering decline of over 40 per cent in trade-union membership was indicative of the weakness of the party and the trade unions in this contested terrain”. Youth unemployment was particularly high and many demoralised youth turned to fascism (Gruber, p 10; Rabinbach, pp 65-66).

The Rise of Dolfuss

In 1932, the Austro-Marxists were on the verge of controlling the Austrian parliament. With the more moderate pan-Germans breaking away from Engelbert Dolfuss’ Christian Socials, there was the prospect of a coalition socialist government. (nb: Dolfuss was ultimately to head the ‘Austro-Fascist’ regime following the 1934 civil war) At first Dolfuss offered the Social Democrats “a grand coalition”, but when
Bauer refused, Dolfuss moved to dissolve parliament and establish autocratic rule by decree (Rabinbach pp 80-81).

Free assembly was banned and heavy-handed state censorship imposed. The army broke up a political railway workers’ strike in defence of democracy. When the Austrian socialists attempted to convene parliament in March 1933, they were violently dispersed (Rabinbach pp 88-89). On 31 March Dolfuss banned the Schutzbund but refused a request from the Social Democrats to ban the fascist Heimwehr paramilitaries (Rabinbach pp 92-93). In the months that followed the Schutzbund was driven underground, and slowly broken down with the arrest of hundreds of its officers and the confiscation of many of its substantial weapons caches (Rabinbach pp 166-167, pp 184-185). Concentration camps were established, capital punishment reinstated, and the constitutional law court was ended. Emergency measures also included “curtailing of press freedom, prohibition of strikes and demonstrations”. Preparations for guerrilla warfare had not been made. The Schutzbund was radically weakened by the “decapitation” of its leadership (Duczynska, pp 140-141). Bauer in exile was later to reflect:

> We could have responded on March 15th by calling a general strike. Never were the conditions for a successful strike so favourable as on that day. The counter-revolution which was just then reaching its full development in Germany had aroused the Austrian masses. The masses of the workers were awaiting the signal for battle. The railwaymen were not yet so crushed as they were eleven months later. The government’s military organisation was far weaker than in February 1934. At that time we might have won. But we shrank back, dismayed, from the battle … we postponed the fight because we wanted to spare the country the disaster of a bloody civil war. (Bauer in Rabinbach, pp 90-91)

Ilona Duczynska reflects in her book *Workers in Arms* that the Linz Programme of 1926, which outlined the role of the Schutzbund “lacked a key sentence”, one that Wilhelm Ellenbogen, a leading Social Democrat of the old guard, [who] had pronounced back in 1894: “Whoever at the moment of decision is incapable of action concedes defeat” (Duczynska, pp 66-67).

Dolfuss’s strategy of wearing down social democracy was perhaps empowered by Bauer’s counter-strategy of encouraging and participating in negotiations with right-wing forces, with successive attempts to negotiate compromise, even to the point of accepting a corporatist Catholic constitution as an emergency measure (on the understanding that the independence of the free trade unions and the Social Democratic Party would be preserved). Thus, Duczynska reflects: ‘The Social Democratic Party’s position of power gradually crumbled, [and] its “political intent” had also unavoidably shrunken – to the point of hoping for hibernation under the protective shield of the “corporate state”’ (Duczynska, pp 134-135). In the end, mass
strike action was not a prospect as years of retreat and repression had led to “apathy” among the masses (Duczynska, pp 142-143).

Importantly, though, Bauer had willing partners among the moderates in the Christian Social Party, even at times including suggestions of compromise from Dolfuss himself. Indeed, socialist negotiators might have felt emboldened after the 15 May encyclical by Pope Pious XI advocating “a Catholic corporatist social order” but, as against fascism, maintaining the “free autonomy” of social groups (Rabinbach, pp 170). The idea of a potential “subjective element” in armed resistance might likewise be thought of as applying to diplomacy, though given the trajectory of events since 1927, Schutzbund mobilisation in March 1933 looks like it would have been a stronger prospect.

Ironically, Dolfuss had entered into negotiations with Mussolini, seeing an alliance with Fascist Italy as a guarantee against the intrigues and even the direct intervention of Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler. Otto Bauer was to reflect when in exile in 1938 that this Austrian fascism, linked with Catholic clericalism, was “intended to suppress by force German-nationalist Fascism (in favour of Anschluss) and the working class at the same time.” Mussolini had insisted upon the dismemberment of Austrian social democracy as a condition of ‘protection’ (Bauer in Bottomore, pp 183-184; Rabinbach, pp 137).

At the Social Democratic Party’s final conference in October 1933 the Right and Left made gains at the expense of the centre. The Left were willing to risk civil war, but the Right were willing to make more concessions and compromises for the sake of peace (Rabinbach, pp 151-153). Left dissidents in the party spoke of “the revolutionary will to struggle” and argued that the leaders were “incapable of adhering to their own program” (i.e., the Linz Programme) (Rabinbach, p 131). In many ways, the left Opposition’s response had simply been a reiteration of the already-existing Linz Programme. Thus: “If the bourgeoisie nonetheless succeeds and destroys the battleground of democracy, state power can only be won through a civil war” (Rabinbach, p 117).

A compromise motion at the conference also proposed that the party take the offensive in re-establishing rights of association, assembly and speech, and also maintenance of conditions for workers and support for the unemployed (Rabinbach, pp 144-145). However, following the conference the repression continued, with arrests of activists and meetings broken up. Yet the union and party leaders held back on mobilising the Schutzbund and the workers, believing even at this stage that negotiation remained the best hope. Attempts by the socialists to negotiate a broad front against German fascism, with a united parliament behind Dolfuss, and the Schutzbund allowing itself to fall under government control also failed, arguably partly due to Dolfuss’ dependence on extreme right forces (eg, the ‘Heimwehr’ paramilitaries and Mussolini) (Rabinbach, pp 146-149).
At this point, much that remained of the Schutzbund leadership felt that war was inevitable. Bauer had warned of the futility of civil war for the sake of pride when the human cost would be great, but there was also the strategic importance of establishing the precedent: European social democracy would not capitulate to fascism without a fight. Ultimately, civil war was sparked with the shooting of two Schutzbund members in the search for weapons caches, and with the dissolution of all local and regional governments opposed to the Austrofascist regime. Even moderate regional Christian Social governments that preferred negotiation found themselves liquidated organizationally. Schutzbund resolve may also have been stiffened when party leader Richard Bernasek came into possession of a “secret decree” that “all officials of the Social Democratic Party are to be located and arrested at their homes” (Rabinbach, pp 182-184, 186-187, 193).

In the ensuing struggle, the Schutzbund was incapable of fully implementing its emergency plan for securing the capital and arming the working class. Its command structure was compromised by hundreds of arrests and the confiscation of arms. The general strike shut down power and the tramways, but the railway workers had been effectively broken months earlier, forcibly subsumed into Dolfuss’ corporatist “Fatherland Front”. This was of central importance as these workers were in a position to slow or prevent the flow of troops and supplies from the regions and into Vienna (Rabinbach, pp 196-197). Duczynska also observes that a successful general strike would have “deprived the government of communications and mobility” (Duczynska, p 179).

The fascist militias, army and police had prepared for the day, were not missing their leadership, and had access to heavy artillery, which they employed ruthlessly even against civilian areas. According to Rabinbach some historians think “only 40,000 men were available [on the socialist side] when the insurrection broke out” (of an original 80,000) (Rabinbach, pp 200-202). Gruber asserts that even among these, only “a tiny minority of workers had risen spontaneously” (Gruber, p 5).

The fighters were divided with regard to tactics: “entrenchment in strongholds, or [engagement] in mobile street fighting …” (Duczynska, p 206). As it turned out there were instances of both, with mobile sharpshooters exacting significant casualties, heavy fighting in areas of Vienna, including the imposing and fortress-like housing blocks, which were symbolic of social-democratic culture and achievement. Gruber observes that it had likely been a deliberate policy to strategically construct these projects “[overlooking] municipal transportation [and] … key infrastructure”, as Conservative forces had long prophesised (Gruber, 1983, p 57).

Arguably, preparations for a guerrilla conflict ought to have been in place much earlier. Though Schutzbund training was apparently good enough that if they had acted much earlier when morale was higher and before sweeping arrests of their
officers and when the general strike may have succeeded – victory may have been possible in 1933, as suggested by Bauer himself. The Schutzbund was not “fully broken until February 21 [1934], one week after the civil war began”. However, even after the fighting ceased the government summarily hanged several leading socialists as reprisals (Rabinbach, pp 208-209, Duczynska p 212). Following this defeat, the SDAP itself, a party Gruber suggests consisted of some 660,000, was effectively liquidated by an iron fist, though Duczynska observes that the Schutzbund carried on as an underground organisation for several years. Over one thousand of their number were to fight for Republican Spain and in other struggles against fascism (Gruber, p 5, Duczynska, pp 212-242).

Thus ended the cultural experiment of Red Vienna, and with it the hopes of Austrian social democracy. Dolfuss himself was later assassinated, in 1934, by Nazi sympathisers. In 1938, Mussolini abandoned the Austrian government as part of a pact with Hitler, and no one else was willing at the time to protect the Austrofascist regime from the designs of the Nazis. Otto Bauer personally managed to flee the country in the early phases of the conflict, and even until the end, argued that negotiation remained the party’s best chance. Recriminations followed, with many arguing the strategically conservative measures implemented by the social-democratic executive had left workers and activists “ill prepared and demoralised”. Gruber refers to a “paralysis of will” similar to the German Social Democrats’ response to the rise of Hitler, a practice at odds with the content of the 1926 Linz Programme which had advocated defensive force to preserve democracy (Gruber, pp 4-5).

Explaining the nature of Austro-Marxism as a Third Road

The tightrope that the Austro-Marxists walked between reform and (Bolshevist) revolution also had practical implications between 1925 and 1934. Having been spared a major split during World War I on communist and social-democratic lines, a consequence was that their political outlook was similar to that of the pre-World War I socialist Second International. In the immediate post-war Austrian environment, the methods of the Bolsheviks were thought by most of the Austro-Marxists to be counter-productive and premature. Similarly, diluted reformism was also felt to be undesirable, perhaps partly as a consequence of a recent history of uncritical opportunism (e.g., revolutionary Germany 1918-19) and also as a consequence of an appreciation of the problems of naïve reformism, and a desire for an (ultimately) qualitative transition.

As the years progressed, the Austro-Marxists believed it possible that they could secure a qualitative (i.e., revolutionary) socialist transition through the democratic state without violent confrontation, with the Schutzbund as a kind of “insurance policy”. Hence, they can be thought of as having taken a Third Road – refusing both Bolshevism and “[integration] into bourgeois politics”. Instead, they chose a
gradualist orientation, securing for themselves “strongholds” in the state apparatus, as well as in “the factories, in the barracks and in the schools”. This perspective was bolstered by circumstances whereby the party had not split as in other countries (Rabinbach, pp 28-29, p 40). At the same time, as with others discussed in this thesis, e.g., Luxemburg and Kautsky, Austro-Marxism might ultimately have been considered a Third Way compared with “left-hegemonic” Stalinism, which had abandoned communism in the authentic sense intended by Marx. That is, the Austro-Marxists did not share the same goals as ‘really existing Stalinism’.

Otto Bauer’s point (cited above) is representative of the outlook of the Austrian Social Democrats during the period in question,

where the working class is divided, one workers’ party embodies sober, day-to-day Realpolitik, while the other embodies the revolutionary will to attain the ultimate goal … Only where a split is avoided are sober Realpolitik and revolutionary enthusiasm united in one spirit. (Bauer in Bottomore, pp 46-47)

This is suggestive of a practical but not necessarily pragmatic (i.e., in the sense of compromising core values) outlook, involving sober assessments of the balance of class forces; not willing to risk everything on the basis of a revolutionary will to power against the odds but willing to employ defensive force in the context of dual power; and genuinely preparing for the (presumably inevitable) revolution to come. The dual-power strategy, meanwhile – especially the maintenance of the Schutzbund – suggests an appreciation of the class nature of the existing state, with the threat of the Schutzbund a defence of the battleground of democracy. In a further distinction from opportunist social democracy, Bauer’s quote is suggestive of discipline and unity on the Left, of avoiding the trap-falls of sectarianism, and staving off degeneration into social chauvinism, as occurred in revolutionary Germany under Ebert, Noske and Scheidemann.

Bottomore especially notes Otto Bauer’s conception of “slow revolution”, involving a “gradual, patient” institutional strategy of “growth from within” (Bauer in Bottomore, p 39). This was counter-hegemony in practice, much as suggested by Antonio Gramsci. The Austro-Marxist strategy envisaged a central role for cultural strategy in preparing for the new society even within the womb of the old. Helmut Gruber recalls SDAP efforts to transform workers into “self-confident actors” through radical educational reform, sport and cultural engagement, and to lift workers from poverty and squalor via an ambitious public-housing programme, comprehensive public health and social welfare measures, provision of workers’ libraries and public lectures (Gruber, pp 5-7).

So it was the Austro-Marxist strategy of ongoing dual power with its emphasis on working-class and socialist unity and its approach of cultural growth from within which together distinguished the movement both from mainstream social democracy,
and also from Bolshevism (during this period morphing into Stalinism). And Austro-Marxism was also distinctive on account of its preference for a democratic and liberal path, and with its status as a great social movement (mobilising not tens but hundreds of thousands in Vienna alone).

The Austro-Marxist view of liberal democracy was also apparent in the work of Karl Renner. It provides an additional rationale for the Austro-Marxist emphasis on dual power. Renner wrote in 1921-22 in ‘Democracy and the Council System’:

The role of a political democracy is to reveal and set free all existing oppositions, but also to harmonise them, and to effect this accommodation through the law and the courts. (Renner in Bottomore, pp 199-200)

As Renner explained, these “oppositions” can “only be settled by the victory of one interest and the defeat of another”. “Hence there necessarily stands behind political democracy the use of force, an organised public power, and coercive action.” Renner therefore notes the danger that “democratic safeguards … collapse” when neither group “can or will submit” and hence, “a struggle to possess the means of coercion, the real power of execution.” So, historically in times of revolution: “That group which possesses or gains the real power, will then form its own state.” (Renner in Bottomore, pp 199-200).

This is epitomised by the Bolshevik seizure of power, with the Soviets comprising the new state administrative infrastructure, and with the formation of the Red Army. The theory behind these developments was expressed well by Lenin in The State and Revolution. It is also epitomised by the experience of the French revolution; and other revolutions, and its substance had been grasped also by Lassalle. Yet, having theorized as much, it is reasonable to argue that the Austro-Marxists ought to have detected Conservative Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dolfuss’s intention – to form his own state and usurp the democratic state, to prevent the socialists assuming power – from the very first moment he moved against the parliament.

There are many ways in which Austro-Marxism during this period can be considered a Third Road or Third Way. In some ways, there are parallels with the Kautskyan line, with a preservation of the spirit and the content of the old, pre-war Second International. While social democracy increasingly capitulated to revisionism and (purely parliamentary) reformism, the Austro-Marxists retained a revolutionary outlook, which might be seen even as a conciliatory synthesis, of revolutionary reforms. Their dual-power strategy, their often-innovative Marxist analysis and their “growth from within” approach distinguished the Austro-Marxists markedly from other Social Democrats, many of whom increasingly were integrated within the bounds of the first way of capitalism. This was also the case in the sense that socialism, in the Marxist sense, remained their ultimate goal – making it possible to interpret their strategy as a Third Road rather than a Third Way. Yet, their passion for
democracy and freedom ensured a position, an analysis, a culture – radically distinct from the rising Second Way of Bolshevism and later Stalinism. Their left unity agenda was also crucial in establishing their movement and methods as a distinct Third Road. Under attack from Conservatives, Bauer was to explain in 1932 that which distinguished him (and the Austro-Marxists) from the Bolsheviks,

was something more essential than any tactical considerations, something fundamental, something which is based on my whole conception of the development of human culture: my esteem for the irreplaceable value of the individual, for spiritual freedom. (Bauer in Rabinbach, p 82)

The Austro-Marxists’ effective dual-power strategy, though, was unique for the European Left in the 1920s and early 1930s; it was the consequence of an analysis that grasped the usual class nature of the state, with any equilibrium in the state apparatus assumed to be a temporary state of affairs. The strategy arose from specifically Austrian circumstances, especially socialist leadership during the revolution, and the arms the socialists came to possess, partly because of their early dominance of the Volkswehr during the revolutionary period of 1918-1920.

Austro-Marxist Writings during the Crisis Period

Austro-Marxists wrote a number of important texts during and after the crisis period of 1925-1934. These penetrating observations remain important today in part because they stand as an object lesson on the importance of left unity and working-class unity during times of such crisis. The Austro-Marxists’ analyses of fascism are also important because they provide a valuable legacy in pin-pointing the origins and nature of fascism. Specifically, we will look at the contributions of Otto Bauer and Max Adler during this period.

Otto Bauer’s Analysis of Fascism

Although developments in Austria must have left him feeling devastated, Otto Bauer was to write an insightful account of fascism while in exile in 1938. This analysis was a legacy Bauer left to the world: an aid in understanding the regimes of Hitler and Mussolini; and in understanding comparable regimes even today. In the work, entitled simply ‘Fascism’, Bauer traces the origins of modern fascism, observing the “expulsion” of “masses of participants from bourgeois life” in the post-World War I period, “[turning] them into ‘declasses’”, clinging “to the forms of life and ideologies acquired during the war”, specifically a “militaristic, anti-democratic [nationalism]”. Bauer explains how these layers were well-positioned to appeal to “pauperised and embittered” masses “of the lower middle class and peasantry”, rallying them around “the militarist-nationalist “militias”” (Bauer in Bottomore, p 168). Here Bauer referred
not only to Austria but also to Germany and Italy, as well as other nations set upon a fascist trajectory during the crisis period emerging from the Great Depression.

More specifically Bauer associated the rise of fascism with deeper structural crises of capitalism in the post-World War I environment. Here “the capitalist class sought to restore [profits] by raising the level of exploitation” and reversing past working-class gains (Bauer in Bottomore, p 168). Bauer summarised the situation aptly when he wrote: “In bourgeois democracy the capitalist class rules, but it rules under the constant pressure of the working class” (Bauer in Bottomore, p 176). However, uncertain about whether it could achieve its ends under democracy, the bourgeoisie turned to the fascist militias. In Italy, then in Germany, at first it ignored fascist violence, then it armed the fascists, and finally “persuaded the state apparatus to hand over power to the fascists” (Bauer in Bottomore, p 168). Bauer continues, “as a result of the help which it had received from the bourgeoisie fascism became too strong to serve as a mere tool, and sought power itself” (Bauer in Bottomore, pp 173-174).

Yet Bauer also noted how “the development of the [still essentially capitalist] economy [remained] dependent on the rate of profit” and thus “the interests of profit-making [disguised] themselves as community interests” (Bauer in Bottomore, p 178). Here the class interests of fascism’s bourgeois allies ensured that fascist elites would ultimately turn against their petty-bourgeois base. In the German instance: “Hitler crushed the petty bourgeois rebellion of the S.A. which demanded a “second revolution” (Bauer in Bottomore, p 179). Emerging from this, therefore, was “the unlimited dictatorship of large capital and the large landowners”, in alliance with the fascist state, a “capitalist-militarist dictatorship” (Bauer in Bottomore, pp 180, 183). Potentially dissenting civil interests, meanwhile, were silenced “as a result of the incorporation of their organisations and the abolition of freedom of the press and of voting” (Bauer in Bottomore, p 178).

Bauer was also notable for his appreciation of the appeal and nature of fascist propaganda in the context of the totalitarian state. Hence, he noted the power of “radio and films”, as well as “the techniques of mass organisation and mass demonstrations”, including exploitation of “youth organisation … of sport … and of children’s and youth organisations” (Bauer in Bottomore, pp 184-185).

By the time Bauer was writing (1938), it was also apparent that aggressive fascism in Germany and Italy was preparing and re-arming for war. This effectively meant ending the Depression by fully utilising all available human and material resources. Even as terror descended and freedom was crushed many were impressed; the total fascist state imposed the will of its leading caste without need for compromise, or accommodation of civil rights for dissenters (Bauer in Bottomore, p 181). As Bauer explained, this “managed economy”,
retards the growth of unemployment by inflationary and super-protectionist economic policies. It depresses wages ruthlessly, reduces “social overheads”, and thus restores the level of profits. It forces the unemployed ruthlessly into compulsory labour, and hence can boast of great public works. (Bauer in Bottomore, p 181)

Elements of the capitalist class, sensing the possibility of war, would recoil from fascism at this point. War, after all, is not good for trade; nor is total mobilisation amenable to the retail sector. Further, “the rentier class … fears a decline in share values”. Bauer explained at the time, and perhaps hopefully, that these factors “set the Fascist governing caste in opposition to factions of the capitalist ruling class” (Bauer in Bottomore, pp 181-182). The die was already cast, however. When war came, it would only further strengthen the hand of this Nazi “caste”.

**Max Adler on German Fascism**

Writing in 1933, before Austrian socialism’s destruction, Max Adler argued that internal divisions in the German proletariat had been essential to the rise of German fascism. Going further than the Marxist schema of working class, reserve army of labour, and lumpenproletariat, Adler supposed more “fundamental divisions” had rent the proletariat asunder, and in ways not at all anticipated by Marx (Adler in Bottomore, pp 224-225). Rather Adler posits the growth of a labour aristocracy, both the most skilled workers with the highest salaries, and professional labour movement functionaries who had become divorced from the experiences and consciousness of rank and file workers (Adler in Bottomore, p 229-230).

Even at the time of the First International (in the nineteenth century) there had existed a fear that ‘the improvement of the workers’ position … “would leave a wholly impoverished fifth estate”’. Engels specifically had warned of the threat of embourgeoisement, “in the sense of petty bourgeois respectability and ideals” and abandonment of a class-struggle perspective. Here there was also the influence of ideas of economic/class mobility (Adler in Bottomore, pp 227-228). Referring in part to German social democracy, Adler held that these tendencies can lead to a “harmful degeneration”, a “fatal division of labour”. With “strict parliamentarianism”, “the well-informed parliamentary group and its view of policy was to replace the activities of the party as a whole” (Adler in Bottomore, pp 236-238).

**Hence, Adler explains:**

Thus there was accomplished one of the most fatal changes possible in a living party, its outcome being the weakening in the mass membership of the readiness for action and responsibility. They were almost drilled to wait first for commands from above, so that they did not have a view of their own; and they
regarded all those who formed their own judgements, or were critical, as destroying or splitting the party. (Adler in Bottomore, p 238)

Most crucially, this orientation served to erode,

the revolutionary spirit of the leading strata [with the effect of] intellectual disarmament … one obvious consequence of which was the neglect of any preparations for physical defence, thus leaving the German labour movement incapable of decision and action. (Adler in Bottomore, p 231)

With the Depression there arose a stratum of permanently unemployed who had not seen work for many years. Adler contends,

it is vain to … appeal to them to uphold and defend [the social and political achievements of the workers movement] since they do not experience, and have little prospect of ever enjoying, the benefits of these achievements. (Adler in Bottomore, p 242)

Amidst this human tragedy the German Social Democrats largely supposed the crisis was only temporary. However, as the years went by the Depression continued. Adler explained how “the unemployed were driven almost entirely into the ranks of the Communists”, with a division between “the satisfied workers” supporting the German Social Democrats and the communists as “the party of the unemployed and the hungry” (Adler in Bottomore, pp 243-244). The fateful consequence of these circumstances was that while only the employed had the means to fight, for instance by “a general strike” but did not have the leadership, the unemployed “did appeal for a general strike … but had no means of carrying it out” (Adler in Bottomore, p 244).

For Adler the crucial issue of the day was that of “[re-establishing] the working class itself as a united, harmonious community, capable of waging economic and ideological struggles”, this being “the real condition for that desired organisational united front” (Adler in Bottomore, pp 247-248). Arguably, the logic of this position also suggested conciliation and co-operation between Social Democrats and Communists, if not organisational re-integration then at least a working popular front. It was the tragedy of the German working-class movement that the united front so desired by Adler was not achieved; few had perceived the forces at work with such clarity as this important theorist. Adler’s analysis remains useful and instructive even now. It comprises a warning should such tendencies arise again and is an aid for historical understanding.
Conflicting and Mediating Themes in Austro-Marxism

Austro-Marxism during the years of crisis, dissolution and exile is usefully considered from a number of stances: the themes of determinism and alleged passivity and fatalism (of which Bauer has been accused by some), and counter-posing this to the active perspective of Max Adler, and in addition to Adler's effective renunciation of dialectical materialism. Also relevant here are conflicting or mediating themes of individualism and collectivism, and the very nature of the human condition. The themes of mediation and conciliation versus radical negation, which became practically manifest with a series of retreats and compromises leading, finally, to the dissolution and defeat of the SDAP are also relevant. Most specifically, these issues found expression in an effective strategy of dual power exercised by the Austro-Marxists.

Some see in Austro-Marxism during its years of decline a kind of passivity and fatalism, somewhat akin to similar critiques of Kautsky and centrisrn. Rabinbach argues that this perspective led to an “inheritor” outlook; that is, effectively that the task of socialists was to prepare ethically, patiently and practically for the future, and the necessary course of history and economic development would ultimately lead to socialist transition “with a minimum of resistance” (Rabinbach, pp 45-46, pp 60-61). As we have seen, their optimism was greatly mistaken. Yet, the Austro-Marxists theory and politics assumed a subjective dimension as well. The idea that subjective participation in politics, education and cultural preparation were essential and necessary for future transition assumed a further dimension than mere cold economic necessity. Nowhere is this better epitomised than in the work of Max Adler. Adler’s defence of free will is robust and quite distinct from Kautsky’s notion of “willing individuals” who nonetheless enjoy no free will of their own. Crucially, Adler writes of Marx in his The Sociological Meaning of Karl Marx’s Thought that,

the materialist conception of history is concerned simply with the activities of the human mind by which it establishes and develops the conditions of life through social labour … Hence in this theory “man” is not “sacrificed” to “economic laws” with “cold inevitability”; facing these laws with “activity” rather than “passivity” is what “Marx called revolutionary praxis.” (Adler in Bottomore, p 67)

In his ‘A Critique of Spann’s Sociology’, Adler contends that,

besides physical causality, which itself takes various forms, there is also physiological and psychological causality. While physical causality proceeds without consciousness, physiological causality occurs only in, and psychological causality through consciousness. (Adler in Bottomore, p 72)
In an apparent compromise between collectivist and individualist outlooks:

Sociology, if it wants to remain an empirical science, must seek and find society where all experience is alone possible, namely in the individual consciousness. Hence even sociology cannot start from a totality, but must begin with the individual. This individual, however, is socialised man, that is to say, in Marx’s sense, an individual who only makes his historical appearance associated with other men in relations of work and social intercourse. … [The] conditions of our experience are constituted not only by space, time, and categories, but also by other consciousness’s. (Adler in Bottomore, p 75)

Hence, Max Adler’s position at the least begins with an effectively Kantian epistemological scepticism as distinct from Marxism’s traditional attempt to grasp totality through the dialectical method, and as a dialectical and historical process. In this regard, his perspective is similar to that of Bernstein. This is important as it suggests a potentially greater role for the individual will, and a relative openness of history. With Adler, the individual subject is capable both of critical reflection and action, but only in the context of necessarily a priori social and economic relations. For Adler it can be said this is the human condition. The emphasis on the individual, here, is also suggestive of compromise between individualism and collectivist values.

Certainly Austro-Marxist leader Otto Bauer’s outlook was often one of pessimistic (some might simply say ‘sober’) assessment of objective material circumstances. Like Kautsky, Bauer baulked at violence when faced with any impasse, perhaps even where there was the prospect of resolving that impasse through force in socialism’s favour, and like Kautsky, Bauer was acutely aware of the potential human toll of civil war, and had a passionate aversion to violence. This was the case in 1918-20 and remained the case in 1927 and in 1933-34. The example of the Russian Civil War, perhaps was instructive.

The Austro-Marxists, by virtue of an effective dual-power strategy maintaining their own paramilitary presence were not naïve reformists. Their strategy of defensive force comprised a true Third Way between purely parliamentary reform and (Bolshevist) revolution. Arguably, though, fear of sparking repression and civil war, or even foreign intervention (Italian, Hungarian, but especially German) as a consequence of right-wing provocations was continuously prominent in the minds of Austro-Marxist strategists (Rabinbach, p 38). While consistent over-restraint fed into a brazen over-confidence among the forces of reaction – who might have accepted a real compromise much earlier had the threat of the Schutzbund and mobilised proletariat appeared more credible earlier on – this is not the whole story.

In practice, Bauer and others on the Social Democratic Executive were willing to go to great lengths for provisional reconciliation, to avert the human cost of a civil war and to address the greater threat of German fascism. Further, there was the underlying
assumption of many Austro-Marxists that capitalist contradictions would still necessarily develop and resolve themselves in such a way that the ruling class itself would finally admit the sheer necessity of socialism, ceding power with something more like a whimper than some grand-final confrontation. If socialism remained inevitable still, and there remained hope for compromise, Austro-Marxist leaders preferred patience to risky initiative that would cost lives. Unfortunately, the threat of defensive force meant little as the bourgeoisie and fascist paramilitaries came to assume that the Schutzbund itself comprised “a paper tiger”. Of relevance here is Leon Trotsky’s telling observation: “You may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you” (Trotsky, L in Potgieter, T. & Liebenberg, I., p 287).

Comparing the Bolshevist and Austro-Marxist responses to dual power – growth from within versus revolutionary will to power – shows how some of the differences worked in practice. Both the Bolsheviks and the Austro-Marxists pursued a dual-power strategy at some time. For the Bolsheviks this was brief, in the early phases of the Russian Revolution, with the initial formation of the Soviets. The Soviets, soon complemented by the Red Army, were to form the embryonic workers’ state. However, the price of seizing state power and, indeed, of establishing a new state apparatus was the escalation of a brutal and costly civil war – an ‘escalation’, as the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly came after the formation of the White Russian forces, e.g., Kornilov, which were already hostile to the Russian Republic. Here the Bolshevist will to power was supposed to overcome all obstacles and, indeed, at any cost.

By contrast, Austria was marked by an extensive period of dual power, initially with SDAP domination of the post-war Volkswehr (Peoples’ Army), and later with the formation of the paramilitary Schutzbund. However, this was under conditions of peaceful compromise and national unity government with the conservative Christian Socials. The coming decades in contrast with the civil war and terror in Russia were marked in Austria instead by the SDAP’s cultural and electoral strategies that had Vienna a showcase for social democracy. Meanwhile, although the Bolsheviks accused the Austro-Marxists of abandoning the international revolution in 1918-20; from the Austro-Marxists’ perspective there was merely a rejection of the Bolshevist path, and more particularly the conviction that it could not work in Austria. Later attempts to forge a Vienna International, otherwise referred to as the ‘Two and a Half International’, demonstrated that the Austro-Marxists were still serious about the principles and practice of internationalism.

Austro-Marxist compromise in 1918-1920 was aimed at avoiding descent into a civil war, which would pitch Vienna against much of the countryside, and might have resulted in entente intervention. In the short-term there was a policy of conciliation, but the negation of capitalism remained the ultimate objective. Thereafter, gradual electoral gains by the Austro-Marxists raised the prospect of a coalition government led by the SDAP. These gains were buttressed by the Austro-Marxists’ vigorous
cultural strategy. By the time a working majority was achieved, the situation of dual power and equilibrium was passing. A parliamentary majority had been gained but state power itself eluded the SDAP. Having failed to press home the political revolution in 1918-20, and having allowed a gradual decline in the morale, prestige and organisation of the Schutzbund, Austro-Marxism collapsed under the iron heel of Austrofascism in 1934. Long before, Kautsky had been correct; there was no alternative to some kind of political revolution – even if peaceful and gradual.

This is not to say that the Austro-Marxists ought have taken the Bolshevist path, and there is so much in the Austro-Marxist example that inspires when contrasted with the alternative of Stalinist terror. Rather, a more robust policy of dual power, including a fuller capitalisation on the advantage the Austro-Marxists enjoyed in 1918-20 may have established a democratic republic with solid foundations: With functioning workers’ councils in a context of institutionalised codetermination – these may have ensured the preconditions for a democratic socialist victory – secured via a strong republic and democratic state, with the ‘insurance policy’ of a committed republican army and a credible Schutzbund as last resort.

The consequence of all this is that both the potential and the limitations of cultural mobilisation need to be kept in mind. Bauer probably was right, that there was a period of equilibrium during which neither the SDAP nor the Conservatives held total state power, but perhaps too eager for compromise and even temporary conciliation, the opportunity was spent. The Austro-Marxists may well have been correct to avoid the Bolshevist path and civil war but there will forever be the question: ‘What might have been?’ Even amidst dual power, the state gradually reverted to its role as both a class instrument and as the instrument of the traditional cultural-conservative ideology.

The opportunity for more thoroughgoing revolutionary reform was there to be grasped in 1918-1920 – but without civil war – that is, when the SDAP enjoyed the greatest political leverage and bargaining power over their Conservative (later fascist) rivals. The conciliation of reform and social-democratic revolution, if it is to work, rests upon both a practical incrementalism and a readiness to press forward the reform programme boldly when the opportunity arises. It also demands a comprehension of the nature of state power, and of globally reinforcing bourgeois economic interests. With regard the opposition of principle and pragmatism, both the Bolsheviks and the Austro-Marxists may be seen as principled or pragmatic at different times and in different ways. The Bolsheviks embraced a mentality of ‘whatever it takes’, a pragmatism of sorts, and yet, would not compromise in their final goal or in their determination to implement the dictatorship of the proletariat as they construed it. They interpreted the compromises of the Mensheviks, Austro-Marxists and others as opportunism. In comparison, the Austro-Marxists were pragmatic in their strategic pursuit of national unity in order to avoid the human toll of civil war. In certain...
respects this was to backfire on them. This strategy was based upon the principled position of valuing human life.

**Other Austro-Marxist Legacies**

As we have observed, the Austro-Marxist legacy arising from the 1925-1934 period was hardly insignificant: Apart from their practical example of cultural counter-hegemony and dual power there were also ground-breaking critiques of: the sources of, and nature of fascism; of divisions on the Left; and of the phenomenon of labour aristocracy and the emergence of a fifth estate.

From the period preceding the 1925-1934 time frame, Rudolf Hilferding’s work on finance capital (*Finanzkapital*, 1910) and the organised capitalism arising out of World War I are also well worthy of mention. *Finanzkapital* concerned the rise of banking capital and economic concentration, with capital seeking the areas of highest profitability, and with capital export and the conquest of foreign markets dependent on the size of domestic economies. Hilferding saw the rise of finance capital, most importantly with the result of centralized ownership and control, as actually expediting the socialisation of the means of production (Harold James, pp 847-855).

Later, during the First World War and in its wake, Hilferding came to see the rise of a wartime general cartel, with the ensuing suggestion that “the imperialist state”, involving “the most concentrated form of economic power”, could be “easily overthrown”, and exactly on account of that narrow concentration. Indeed, the rise of precisely such an imperialism was seen by Hilferding as potentially expediting the proletarian seizure of power (Harold James, pp 856-857). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage with this material in depth, except to say that in Hilferding’s work in the milieu of post-World War I and the Depression era, German social democracy was hindered by coalition politics and the demands of the Liberal DVP (i.e., German People’s Party) for tax cuts, with the consequence of sharp deflation (Harold James, pp 862-866).

Both Hilferding and his German social-democratic contemporaries had seen European unification as creating a larger market, delivering a decisive stimulus to the European economy; but as fascism reared its ugly head this was rendered politically impossible. Neither was the Soviet model seen as a solution, for as Hilferding had observed, under Stalinism “the pretty-obvious link between socialism and freedom is torn” (Harold James, pp 866-888).

Meanwhile, Max Adler, relegated to the practical-political margins, was perhaps the most innovative and radical Austro-Marxist thinker. His appreciation of subjectivity and objectivity and their conditioning of each other, met by workers with revolutionary praxis (the unity of theory and practice) comprises an interpretation of
and variation upon Marx that holds hope for the power of free will and reflection in the context of an appreciation of the necessarily and essentially social nature of humankind.

His practical critique of social-democratic hierarchy and the stifling of political initiative from below also strikes a chord in the modern day. Social democracy certainly has not been immune from Michels’ “iron law of oligarchy”. Now, as then, independent activity and criticism are seen as breaches of discipline or even of loyalty. Oligarchy and patronage are maintained in direct opposition to the doctrines of human liberation advanced historically by the Left. Adler was able to perceive this and to declare openly the nature of the problem, perhaps precisely because of his position on the relative margins of the party hierarchy.

Austro-Marxism provides an object lesson in the need for both free initiative from below and at the same time for discipline when necessary. There is the need for restraint in the face of provocation intended to create the pretext for repression. The 1927 riots, after all, were the beginning of the end for Austro-Marxism, but there is also a need for – as Adler called it – “readiness and responsibility” among the mass membership (Alder in Bottomore, p 238). Indeed, that is the stuff of the living, breathing and self-correcting proletarian democracy as envisaged by Luxemburg. The Austro-Marxists provide an object lesson in the potential and possible pit-falls of dual-power strategy, and most particularly that of a democratic-defensive, dual-power approach. Their strategy here also underscores the possible dangers posed by the capitalist state, and most particularly its fascist variant. Hence the success of their cultural strategy in mobilising hundreds of thousands ought to factor into left strategies even today; but so, too, should the ease with which the fascist state crushed these institutions once social democracy’s “dual power insurance policy” – the Schutzbund and social democratic penetration of the “Volkswehr” – was removed from the equation. Both for their theoretical contributions, and their practical cultural/counter-hegemonic examples, the Austro-Marxists have left us a valuable legacy in their responses to dilemmas that the Left of the early twenty-first century faces, whether it realises it or not.
Chapter Nine:

Conclusion

In this thesis I have sought to explore a number of arguments. First, I argued that there is a multiplicity of currents in left politics that may be considered Third Roads or Third Ways during the 1848-1934 period. Second, I argued that these Third Roads and Third Ways developed relative to the First Ways and Second Ways of capitalism and the dominant radical left currents that emerged at different times during the period in question. Third, I argued that these relative Third Roads and Third Ways tackled a substantial array of contested themes, and that their response to these themes helped to define practical and theoretical responses. Indeed, in their response to those contested themes, these Third Roads and Third Ways provided a defensible legacy. It is important to address these themes because these neglected traditions have important insights that otherwise may be lost, and because the democratic left traditions have a redeeming potential when posed alongside Stalinism, for instance, and the widespread view that socialism is totalitarian and to be discredited.

The many and varied Third Roads and Third Ways responded in different ways to such oppositions as determinism/contingency, materialism/idealism, negationconciliation, internationalism/nationalism, objectivism/subjectivism, reform/revolution, authoritarianism/liberty, principle/pragmatism, and orthodoxy/revisionism, and others explored in the thesis, which are too numerous to list here.

Specifically, the Third Roads during the period 1848-1934 included the following:

- Luxemburgian libertarian Marxism;
- Orthodox or centrist Marxism after 1914; and
- Austro-Marxism.

The socialist Third Ways included:

- Lassalleanism; and
- Bernsteinian revisionism.
Luxemburgian Marxism, Austro-Marxism and some lineages of orthodox Marxism were defined here as Third Roads to the extent that they maintained the final goal, the communist goal, of the Marxist movement, and sought to respond to contested themes such as reform/revolution. Luxemburg’s libertarian Marxist perspective can also be considered a Third Road in that it stands implacably opposed to the reality of a Stalinism (the Second Way of its time) that embraced “socialism in one country”, never-ending terror and labour militarisation, and which substituted Soviet foreign policy for the interests of international socialism.

Marx and Engels’ scientific socialism, and the orthodox and later, centrist Marxism were the dominant revolutionary Second Way before 1914; so it is important to consider centrist Marxism given that it lost its Second Way status with the rise of Bolshevism. Depending on interpretation, it emerges instead as a Third Road, or even a Third Way when the degeneration of Stalinism is considered. By contrast, Bernsteinian revisionism outright rejected the notion of some final goal. Lassalle meanwhile proposed a different end goal. This meant a strong enabling state using its power to lift the masses from poverty and ignorance, while establishing universal suffrage and bringing about an economy on the basis of workers’ co-operatives. Therefore, because they reject the final goal of Marxian socialism, we define these perspectives as Third Ways.

With Stalinism emerging as the dominant Second Way, the nexus between socialism, freedom and democracy is torn violently. Those currents which are truer to Marxist tradition – of Luxemburg, orthodoxy, Austro-Marxism – and so at odds with Stalinism that they can all be legitimately interpreted as Third Ways. That is, Ways that advance on the idea that it is not merely the means that are in question, but the final ends as well.

Our treatment of relative Third Roads and Third Ways has not been exhaustive, for that task goes beyond the scope of this thesis. Thus, regrettably, the thesis does not give the attention due to Rosselli or Martov, or Swedish democratic revisionism in any depth. In concluding, I will summarize some legacies of the various Third Road and Third Way proponents, and then draw connections between the writers in relation to some of the most important contested themes they negotiated.

**Lassalle**

Ferdinand Lassalle forwarded a left Hegelian political socialism based on the principle of producers’ co-operatives with state aid, on an early notion of a positive (as opposed to repressive) enabling state, on the pursuit of free, universal and equal suffrage, and on strategies of class collaboration with the imperial Prussian state. Lassalle’s left Hegelian viewpoint mediated between materialist notions of class struggle and idealist notions of final conciliation, promoted through the development
of the socialist idea. Notably, as opposed to Marx, Lassalle viewed the class struggle in political and legal terms. Hence, he saw, as he called it, the ‘fourth estate’ as the bearer of the socialist idea, which heralded final conciliation. Thus, his thought can be seen as a mediating force between radical socialism, which under Marx adopted a materialist posture, and idealism, for which the spiritual was paramount. It could be argued that economism was embraced by much of the Left, and that Lassalle’s emphasis on political and legal forms as autonomous served to mediate between economistic and political notions of socialism.

Unlike Marxists such as Kautsky, Lassalle did not assume that the liberal bourgeois revolution had to come first. Unlike Bernstein and Marx and others, he saw the state as a vehicle for freedom, including the cultural freedom to fully develop people’s human potential, including freedom from ignorance. This contrasted with Marx’s notion that the state would ultimately wither away. In contrast with Lassalle, Marx and Bernstein saw the state overwhelmingly and necessarily as an engine of class despotism. Lassalle’s strategic and theoretical insights comprised a significant legacy, as did his distinctness from Marxism. At a personal level, he contributed greatly to the formative stage of German social democracy.

**Eduard Bernstein**

Bernstein challenged the orthodoxy of his time, developing an apparently reformist revisionism that nonetheless adhered to much from Marx. This revisionism included a modification of Marx’s labour theory of value. His theoretical edifice was more eclectic than totalising. While retaining a sense of progressive teleology, he rejected the grand class-struggle dialectic as the central driving force in all history. He was among the first socialists to recognise the resilience of capitalism, as against theories of crisis, class bifurcation and collapse. He also provided useful theoretical and practical syntheses with regard liberalism and socialism. His theoretical legacy was significant, as was his practical commitment as a socialist parliamentarian and as an activist for the cause of peace during the First World War.

There are a number of themes in tension developed by Bernstein. Much of this occurred in the context of the so-called revisionist controversy, through which Bernstein apparently rejected the revolutionary outlook, embracing instead an evolutionary or reformist perspective. The most basic theoretical objection from Bernstein to the Marxist orthodoxy was the materialist dialectic itself, which, given Bernstein’s sceptical epistemological outlook, could not be assumed. Abandoning the theoretical mission of grasping totality, Bernstein’s practical eclecticism adopts whatever theoretical insights and models as prove useful in the class struggle and that for him, even regardless of parliamentarism and gradualism, persists at a higher level.
Bernstein’s theoretical legacy includes his rejection of impending capitalist collapse or catastrophe (in the foreseeable future), and, therefore, (and as opposed to Luxemburg, for example) the notion of socialism as an objective necessity. Yet, at the same time and despite his rejection of dialectical materialism, his sense of teleology supposed a progressive accumulation of reforms that was a one-way street. Here teleology can be counter-posed to historical indeterminacy. Despite the difficulties involved here, given successive defeats for socialism over many decades, Bernstein’s revisionism still comprises a potentially useful source for the modern Left. Indeed, given Bernstein’s teleological assumptions, reforms could conceivably be accrued over many decades, with the ultimate effect of transforming quantity to quality, that is, a kind of slow revolution, to adopt an Austro-Marxist term. In that way Bernstein can either be seen as an out-and-out reformist or he can be interpreted as bridging the reform/revolution divide, even if unconsciously.

Drawing on Mouffe, we can propose the question: Does Bernstein seek to suppress class struggle through the corporate confinement of the working class? Or (and contra Berman) does he see class struggle leading forward to qualitative change? If we cast the question like this, Bernstein begins to appear more radical, though many would still resist casting him, in his revisionist phase, as a revolutionary because of his evolutionary and gradualist arguments and his emphasis on parliament (Mouffe and Laclau, pp 29-30).

Bernstein’s legacy includes his synthesis of objectivist and subjectivist perspectives pertaining to the labour theory of value, and his rejection of class bifurcation, anticipated the extent to which the middle class would fade away in one form, only to be resurrected in another – for example, the modern middle class, which for Marxists could be seen as an aristocracy of labour. It also needs to be recognised and emphasised that Bernstein’s position was not one of sweeping refutation of all Marxism but, rather, an engagement with Marxism and a revision of a number of contested themes. Importantly, Bernstein also upholds the validity of a broad interpretation of socialism and not just an economistic one. We could refer to it as a pluralistic interpretation as opposed to an economistic interpretation. Hence his use of concepts such as “juridical notions” of equality and justice, “characterisation as a social science”, “identification with the class struggle”, and “co-operative economics” (Bernstein, pp 95-96). Crucially, Bernstein saw socialism as the legitimate heir to liberalism (Bernstein, pp 149-150).

Contrary to common interpretation, Bernstein can be perceived as a bridge between Marxism and pragmatic reformism. His reformist approach has appeal but engagement with Bernstein also means engagement with many key Marxist concepts. Further, if we reconceive reforms after the fashion of slow revolution it is possible to reconcile such themes – for example, reform versus revolution. His theoretical insights, their influence on later social democracy, and his political activism all provide a valuable legacy.
Rosa Luxemburg

Luxemburg upheld principles of necessary capitalist collapse and socialist revolution, as well as the spontaneity of the masses. Her theorization of spontaneity was more complex than often recognised by critics, involving a dialectic whereby the socialist party-political leadership did lead but did so also in the context of adaptation to proletarian initiative. This was to include strategies such as the mass strike. In perhaps the most important aspect of her legacy she strove to reconcile the themes of revolution, liberty and democracy in the face of extreme ‘ends-means calculations’ (Steger) made by the Bolsheviks, including the use of state terror. In this form, as a redemptive pole of attraction for revolutionary socialism and socialism more generally, that is her most significant legacy.

For Luxemburg there were no grey areas between reform and revolution. One was exclusive of the other and, therefore, we cannot speak of Luxemburg mediating these themes. Her aim was the suppression and replacement of the system of wage labour by democratic organisation. For Luxemburg, the orthodox or centrist commitment to revolution became merely rhetorical; reform and revolution were mutually exclusive. Here reform takes place within the framework, “created by the last revolution” and we might extrapolate that Luxemburg is rejecting the constraints of a purely legalistic and constitutional approach to change, as opposed to the act of revolution, which imposes a new constitution by force in the context of the class struggle (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson pp 155-156).

Luxemburg understood socialism as a necessity and not merely of one historical choice among many. In Luxemburg’s view capitalism’s Achilles heel was its imperative to constantly expand into new markets, in part the consequence of overproduction and competition. Competition for limited markets led to imperialist war, but moreover, even ultra-imperialism – as considered by Kautsky as the agreed joint exploitation of the world by the great capitalist powers – could not save capitalism forever. Capitalism would ultimately reach the condition where it became truly global and, therefore, could not externalise markets for exploitation and the dumping of excess produce. That was inevitable and would mean a crisis of under-consumption, which would provoke a collapse, necessarily followed by socialism or by barbarism.

On the other hand, Luxemburg did mediate between the themes of revolution, liberty and democracy. She held the substance of revolution to be democratic, as opposed to increasing centralism resulting in the effective dictatorship of a narrow stratum of Bolshevikist leaders under Lenin (The Bolshevik Central Committee). For Rosa Luxemburg, democracy essentially involved human liberty – liberty as a value in and of itself – but also as the source of self-criticism and hence correction. So, again, she
can be interpreted as seeking to reconcile socialism, liberty and democracy in the wake of Bolshevism. (Even more so, her insights could be applied to later Stalinism) As such, she stands as an important source for the redemption of the socialist tradition. That is part of her legacy.

Her notion of working-class spontaneity also stands in contrast to Kautsky’s preference for deliberate, conscious development of socialist organisation and Lenin’s emphasis on centralized discipline. She must not be understood as denying the need for leadership but, rather, as advocating a leadership that adapted to proletarian initiative, and in that context helped provide direction in stormy times. This specific dialectical understanding of the developing of class consciousness and socialist consciousness through the school of class struggle also contrasts with Lenin’s conception of consciousness, as necessarily being injected into the working class from outside, from the vanguard party. So, Luxemburg can be seen as mediating the themes of proletarian self-initiative and socialist leadership, that is, as providing a synthesis.

Apart from acting as a pole of moral redemption for socialism – reconciling socialist revolution with liberty and democracy – there are other aspects to Luxemburg’s legacy. That legacy includes her critique of necessary capitalist collapse, and of the associated phenomena of under-consumption and globalism, as well as her theorization of the factor of spontaneity in revolution, and the revolutionary strategy of the mass strike. In this these endeavours she argued against Bernstein’s thesis of capitalist adaptation, as well as Kautsky’s notion of disciplined, conscious collective struggle.

Her uncompromising stand on reform versus revolution does not concede the possibility of a series of democratic constitutional breaks, which might instead be envisaged as the substance of slow revolution – a notion that on the other hand, might be accommodated with Bernstein, or even Kautsky. Regardless, her legacy is significant.

**Karl Kautsky**

As considered in this thesis, Karl Kautsky is often regarded as something of an anti-hero on the modern far Left as a consequence of his original equivocation with regards the First World War; but also crucially because of his critique of Lenin and the Bolsheviks. He is interesting in that he epitomises an older Marxist tradition harking back to the early Second International. He developed a distinct orthodox reading of Marx, and later, a distinct centrism in opposition to both revisionism and leftism, and after the rise of Bolshevism the centrism he advocated could be considered a kind of relative Third Road or Third Way. At a practical level no one did more than Kautsky to popularise Marxism after Marx’s own passing in the late nineteenth century. (except perhaps Engels for a time) Not only did Kautsky interpret
and promote Marx’s own work; Kautsky also developed such themes as, “neither reform nor revolution at any price”; disciplined, developed consciousness and organisation; and strategic and tactical conservatism, as opposed to spontaneity and a more aggressive use of the mass-strike strategy (vide, Luxemburg).

Kautsky is worth considering today largely because of the redeeming strength of his criticisms of the Bolsheviks and his anticipation that socialism would be discredited as a consequence of desperate voluntarist strategies based on militarisation of labour, suppression of liberties, extreme centralization and terror (Trotsky, pp 157-159).

Kautsky’s centrism had many components. He maintained the need for political and social revolution, including a shift of power relations in the state itself. As against reformism, Kautsky “retained the conviction that capitalism’s contradictions could not be overcome from within capitalism” (Steenson, p 78). He preferred peaceful means of class struggle, and even then believed that the organised working class needed to keep its powder dry lest it exhaust itself or provoke repression; it was not yet strong enough to overcome. Like Marx, Kautsky preferred open class struggle as opposed to conspiracy, and he believed the associated conflicts would involve great social convulsions that gathered pace over decades.

For Kautsky, specifically there were assumed two possible strategies: “annihilation” or “attrition”, similar in some ways to Gramsci’s “war of movement” and “war of position”. The strategy of attrition may be conceived as a gradual wearing down of the class enemy, including through the channels of suffrage. Furthermore, because of his effective pacifism, this was Kautsky’s preferred strategy (Salvadori, pp 140–141). In this process, the working class would gain in strength and consciousness. This was held to be inevitable, as a consequence of irreconcilable antagonisms of class interest, with intensifying contradictions (overproduction, structural unemployment, periodic cyclical downturn, impoverishment etc.), intensified exploitation and growing social polarisation. This sense of inevitability also stemmed from Kautsky’s philosophical materialism, but as a consequence he stood accused of fatalism and of supporting a philosophy that provided a pretext for passivity.

Hence, the conflicting themes that arise in Kautsky, including in his polemics with Lenin, Trotsky, Bernstein and Luxemburg include – Philosophical materialism (also necessity) versus voluntarism (and choice/contingency); dictatorship versus democracy; amelioration of alienation versus militarisation of labour; open class struggle versus conspiracy; orthodoxy versus revisionism and leftism (Luxemburg/Liebknecht); scientific socialism versus ethical socialism; permanent revolution versus stage-based revolution; annihilation versus attrition; and extreme ends and means calculations (Steger) versus neither reform nor revolution at any price. Also of note, Kautsky’s proposal of irreconcilable class antagonism is radically opposed to modern social-democratic state aspirations towards class conciliation.
As a philosophical materialist, Kautsky recognised human nature as being characterised by ‘will’, but not free will. The scientific method comprised of observing the social mechanics of class struggle through a series of epochs, driven – as Marx understood also – by a developing division of labour, and with the consequence also of an evolving mode of production. Another consequence of the scientific outlook as interpreted by Kautsky was that any formulation of an ethical basis for socialism was considered as of secondary importance at best.

The consequence of Kautsky’s materialist determinism, as opposed to voluntarism, was that social democracy could not expedite revolution by virtue of will or imagination but had to wait for the maturing of material conditions. Accordingly, with the assumption of accelerating class-bifurcation, for Kautsky socialism became “the only thing possible” (Erfurt, pp 116-119). Hence, he faced accusations of promoting fatalism and passivity. The materialist/voluntarist opposition was grasped previously by Marx himself, for whom men make their own history but not as they choose, a stance suggesting a kind of mediation and conciliation of those themes in question.

Kautsky’s schema also led him to endorse a theory of stage-based social revolution for which the bourgeois liberal revolution had to occur first. In accordance with this, it was assumed that Bolshevik attempts at collective will formation – including strategies such as state terror and labour militarisation – threatened to discredit the cause of socialism. To Kautsky – and others, for instance, Martov – Bolshevik voluntarism neglected the preconditions of industrialisation, and of the development of a numerically dominant, conscious and organised working class, a working class that would ultimately be empowered through the struggle for free, universal and equal suffrage. Another aspect of Kautsky’s understanding was that the bourgeois revolution had to come first in order to develop the means of production and hence to give rise to a strong working class, but also the political institutions of (bourgeois) liberal democracy. Here he stood in contrast with Trotsky and his variation on the theory of permanent revolution.

Another problem not just with Kautsky, but with the old Marxist orthodoxy generally, is, as Mouffe and Laclau explain, its status as a closed paradigm where history had a pre-given telos and destination, and where interests and identities were fixed rather than being the consequence of contested articulations. The orthodox Marxists (such as Kautsky) inherited from Marx himself the essentialist notion of the proletariat as the universal class. Whereas today social class is neglected by social theorists in favour of theories of sexuality, gender and so on, during the classical years of Marxism the industrial working class was held to be the bearers of universal (human) emancipation. That is not to say the industrial working class does not have identifiable interests, but internal working class divisions and increased social complexity have put paid to notions of it as the bearer, on its own or alone in its own right, of universal redemption.
To summarise Kautsky’s legacy: In responding to those various contested themes discussed here Kautsky preserved the traditional nexus between democracy, freedom and equality. For generations he was reviled on the far Left for his criticisms of the Bolsheviks. However, with the benefit of hindsight we can see that he was right that extreme means and ends calculations (Steger) and those strategies that followed would backfire, discrediting the socialist cause for generations.

The orthodoxy of Kautsky also had its virtues. A perspective of open class struggle is surely more democratic than a conspiratorial posture. However, we may never return to the confident Marxism of the classical years in which socialism was thought the only thing possible – it was a discourse very much in the spirit of the age, and fuelled progressive struggle in its time. Further, his notion of a strategy of attrition might be applicable today, having, as it does, similarities with Gramscian notions of counter-hegemony and war of position.

Despite Kautsky’s many flaws, he is a source to look to when refuting those who would conflate socialism with totalitarianism, or hold to the Thatcherist mantra “there is no alternative”. As against the common dismissals of Kautsky on the far Left, a balanced appraisal of his efforts acknowledges that his defence of the nexus between socialism, liberty and democracy provides a redeeming feature for the socialist tradition, and that he played a pivotal role in the popularisation of Marxism. That is all part of his legacy.

**Austro-Marxism**

The Austro-Marxists were the central force behind the Austrian revolution of 1918 and used their strong position in the military as a foothold for a democratic republic. Thereafter, they maintained a state of dual power in defence of the democratic road to socialism in a sustained way that contrasted with Bolshevist strategy. This also dovetailed with their notions of slow revolution, and attempts to reconcile coldly realist and enthusiastic currents in socialism, and also, arguably, to mediate between and synthesise revolutionary and reformist tendencies.

Following the revolution in Austria of 1918-1919, Austro-Marxism emerged as a movement in the tradition of pre-Bolshevik revolutionary Marxism: A movement at grips with the realities of state power; passionately committed to liberty and democracy; and willing to defend the democratic path through a strategy of dual power. However, in the years that immediately followed the Austrian revolution, the unwillingness of the Austro-Marxists to carry the revolution through was largely based on the isolation of the revolutionaries in Vienna itself, but also on the unviability of the rump Austrian state emerging from defeat in the Great War. The rump state seemed to have no hope of standing against Entente intervention, though as against this, Lenin and the Bolsheviks emphasized the war exhaustion of the Entente
as well. In addition, it may be supposed Bolshevist-style policies of land redistribution might have won over the peasantry.

In this context it fell to the Austro-Marxists to attempt a mediation – and, indeed, a conciliation – between the themes of reform and revolution, principle and pragmatism, revolutionary enthusiasm and realpolitik. Practically, this took the form of a middle road between revisionism and right social democracy on the one hand, and Bolshevism on the other. In many ways, it was also a continuation of the old (revolutionary) social democracy. Here, notions of slow revolution arguably helped inspire the Eurocommunism of the 1970s and 1980s. For those seeking fundamental, qualitative (but gradual) change, these ideas are still instructive.

The Austro-Marxists left an impressive, if neglected legacy. In the Austro-Marxists’ view there was a place for both ethics and the practical (i.e., scientific) disposition towards capitalism (Bauer in Bottomore, pp 81–84). This inclination to take ethics seriously addressed a blind spot in both orthodox and centrist Marxism, but even more so if we consider Bolshevism, and later Stalinism. Kant’s categorical imperative, to value every human life, and not treat any human being merely as a means, arguably suggested a radical critique of capitalism, and despite the resistance of Kautsky and others, could well be employed to complement Marx.

As against the philosophical materialism common among orthodox Marxists, Max Adler especially was to effectively embrace a kind of Cartesian dualism for which there was the notion of some autonomy of ideas, where the “lawfulness of the mind” was “self-confirming”, through perception. At the same time, this Cartesian dualism involved a distinction between material and mental phenomena (Adler in Bottomore, pp 254, 257). Hence with regard to the base/superstructure Marxist intellectual construct, Adler holds that even ‘economic phenomena themselves are never “material” in the materialist sense, but have precisely a “mental” character’ – in the sense they involve conscious, willing human beings (Adler in Bottomore, p 254).

Before the First World War, Otto Bauer and Karl Renner took their project of mediation and conciliation in other directions. They championed the reconciliation of nationalities in the context of a democratic socialist federation, so that the political shell of Austria-Hungary could in the future provide a viable basis for a multinational, multi-cultural federation, with equal rights of citizenship and an equal share in the national culture (Renner in Bottomore, pp 31–32, 112–116). Hence, a conciliation between nationalism and internationalism – enjoyment of national cultures and identity within a practical federal framework. This support from Renner and Bauer for multiculturalism was before its time. It also suggested a different approach from Leninism. That is, that there should be equality between nations and free national expression, but that national liberation did not have to mean internally homogenous nation-states. As the Austro-Marxists had explained it, here and elsewhere they
pursued the conciliation of realpolitik and revolutionary enthusiasm (Bauer in Bottomore, pp 46–47).

In their attempts at reconciliation they did not have illusions in Stalinism. Arguably, by securing engagement between revolutionary social democrats and communists they could have comprised a democratic pole of attraction, and also a united front against the common enemy. Unfortunately, in their efforts they ultimately failed. However, their efforts might still inspire us today, and in that regard, ‘the book is still open’ on Austro-Marxism.

Austro-Marxist notions of slow revolution also served as the basis of reconciling radical reformist and revolutionary politics, based on the quality of change over time, and not necessarily on a single violent rupture. Although in the context of effective dual power, with a firm foothold in the armed forces, and having established the Schutzbund paramilitary organisation, this dual-power strategy meant they were not naïve reformists. Bauer was to refer to the situation as one of “equilibrium” or “balance” of “class forces”, which during the 1918-1919 revolutionary period included extensive socialist penetration of the armed forces ((Duczynska, pp 30-32; Bauer in Duczynska, p 35; Gruber, pp 37-41).

Arguably equilibrium following periods of crisis does not necessarily last. In this sense Otto Bauer and other Austro-Marxist leaders can be criticised for not consolidating a stronger position in the state when they had the opportunity during the immediate post-World War I revolutionary period. Nonetheless, the example of Austro-Marxists is inspiring. It is also a warning not to lose sight of the balance of power as accords to the ultimate means of execution (for us now that is infers the means to impose decisions through control of an apparatus of force) Hence a parliamentary majority and a thriving counter-culture are not necessarily protections against reaction, if those forces have at their disposal such a pliable apparatus of force. In the midst of the Depression, with high unemployment Austrian labour was already demoralised and weakened before the final battle in 1934. Even in a context of dual power, all efforts by radicals to effect change may come to nought if the movement’s leadership hesitates at the decisive moment, or if they adopt a policy of compromise and retreat enabling the reaction to consolidate, and then rout progressive forces.

Finally, their cultural strategies and their deployment of dual power in the context of a relative equilibrium of class forces provide a storehouse of lessons. Their example is suggestive of the content of a real Third Road to socialism but one where it is possible to progress towards the good society in an embryonic form within the old society; perhaps even a state within a state. This example was achieved through strategies of growth from within (hineinwachsen), and the development of a thriving counter-culture in the social-democratic stronghold of Red Vienna in preparation for future
transition. Here there is a legacy in the form of object lessons with regards the potential, but also the possible limits of cultural counter-hegemony.

Complementing their counter-culture strategy, the Austro-Marxists also developed their stronghold of Red Vienna as the base for an unprecedented democratic socialist counter-culture. As noted, they provided for an impressive array of social infrastructure and services – through the party apparatus or via progressive taxation in the Vienna municipality (Bottomore, p 38, Rabinbach, p 28).

That legacy concerned insights with regard to the adaptation of an organised capitalism during wartime and about the rise of fascism. Specifically, Bauer and Adler were to develop insightful critiques of fascism during the 1930s, conceding the success the fascists had enjoyed in dividing the working class, and playing upon petty-bourgeois fears and resentments following World War I. They provided an analysis of the social forces giving rise to fascism, and of the unity of social forces necessary to fight it.

In summary, the legacies of Austo-Marxism were manifold. Not least of all, they provided object lessons regarding the strengths of, but also the dangers involved with growth from within, as well as dual power and counter-hegemony or war-of-attrition strategies. Arguably, the experience of Austro-Marxism helped inform the New Left and Eurocommunism and stood as a living example of strategies intended to reconcile the Left. Relatively early in the piece Austro-Marxism was also suggestive of multiculturalism as a source of conciliation and co-existence. Austro-Marxists’ engagement with ethics addressed a traditional blind spot of Marxism in a way that would be relevant for today’s would-be radicals also. Their rejection of hard determinism is suggestive of hope that those today who might otherwise be demoralised by the apparently unfavourable odds they face. At a practical level, once more, the achievements of Red Vienna – the counter-culture, the array of public infrastructure and services – were suggestive of the great potential of social democracy.

**Negotiation of Contested Themes**

This section moves to closer examination of some of the most important contested ideological themes explored in this thesis, an examination organised thematically and not restricted to one thinker at a time.

*Reform versus Revolution and Necessity versus Freedom*

It is a legacy of Marxists such as Kautsky, Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky and others to have fought it out over the interpretation of reform and revolution, and in the process to have provided valuable insights into the nature of state power, and the qualitative
substance of revolution. In different ways, all these figures attempted to debunk the notion of the state as a vehicle for reconciliation, and for the universal interest. However, as already observed, in that enterprise they were opposed by Lassalle, for whom the state instead comprised a vehicle for liberation, including liberation from poverty and ignorance. However, it is notable that following the 1917 Russian Revolution Kautsky, the Mensheviks and other Social Democrats became convinced of the case for universal liberal rights and, by inference, only a liberal state could have provided such a guarantor (though even then, in the capitalist context such a state might involve internal contradictions with regards its liberal nature, and its class nature).

By contrast Lenin and Trotsky, and others remained convinced of a both political and epistemological privileging (Mouffe and Laclau, pp 56-57) of the vanguard party and its professional revolutionaries. During the transitional period power was to be centralized in the hands of the party and, after the Jacobin example, terror was to reign as a consequence of grim necessity (Trotsky, p 121). Yet, even following the civil war the sustained relaxation of the terror and of extreme centralization never came. It was to culminate with the personal dictatorship of Stalin, of purges and never-ending terror.

In contradistinction to the ideal of pure democracy, which Lenin saw as an ideological veneer disguising the bourgeois nature of existing democracies, Lenin proposed a proletarian democracy. Luxemburg was correct to identify the threat provided by over-centralism and suppression of any free proletarian public sphere to democracy. For Luxemburg the cleverest central committee was no replacement for a genuinely democratic process that harnessed the energy and insights of the masses. By contrast, here, terror demoralises the very base whose interests it is meant to serve (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, pp 306-307). It is this critique of the Bolshevist model that establishes the Luxemburgian model as a Third Road.

Today we can debate the options available to Lenin and Trotsky. It is all too easy to condemn in retrospect when the reality was starvation, the White Terror and civil war. Perhaps sustained dual power, with an ongoing role for the other socialist parties and for a re-elected constituent assembly, could have seen a retention of a freer public sphere of critical enquiry, even while defending against the Tsarist White generals. No doubt that would have been a risk, but so, too, was the aggressive pursuit of the revolution in Russia in the hope that the Europe-wide revolution would follow. Lenin believed, at best, that Kautsky was naïve with regard to the threat provided by an unreconstructed state apparatus, regardless of the establishment of the constituent assembly. Yet, Kautsky (and the Mensheviks) were arguably correct that the object lesson which many even on the liberal Left derived from the general intensification of state repression and terror in Russia after 1917 was that socialism was the enemy of freedom. Hence, he was also supported by history that neither revolution nor legality ought have been pursued at any price.
Important with regard to this debate, today we can emphasize democracy itself as a *practice* and not only a *form of state*. Having interrogated both definitions there is a place for each, though the contradictions and struggles within the state itself are so marked and complex that to reduce the state exclusively either to a field, a collective actor or an instrument would be a simplification. In different ways, states can take *all* these forms, and often simultaneously. The consequence of an expansion of the meaning of democracy has it that the democratisation of everyday life should also be emphasized, not only through state mechanisms but also through co-operative and mutualist enterprise and practices. This can contribute to a deepening and extension of democracy beyond the usual confines. Democratisation of civil society is as important as the democratisation of the state, and the two can mutually reinforce each other. So, a nuanced understanding of the nature of the state, and of democracy, arises as a consequence, indeed, as the legacy of Third Road and Third Way discourse.

*Reform and Revolution in the context of Materialist Determinism versus Free Will*

The themes of reform and revolution took many forms in light of the differing assumptions of theorists such as Luxemburg, Kautsky and Bernstein. Often these questions were thoroughly entwined with the struggle between revisionism and orthodoxy.

With his revisionism, Bernstein was thought by many on the Marxist Left to be postponing transition permanently. Luxemburg’s notions of spontaneity also contrasted sharply with Kautsky’s vision of conscious, disciplined organisation in the context of a class struggle spanning decades. Determinism (for instance with Kautsky in materialist form, and Lassalle in an idealist form) is also contrasted with perspectives adhering to assumptions of voluntarism and contingency (with voluntarism effectively embraced by the Bolsheviks in their efforts at realising permanent revolution ahead of any stage-based process of change, where the liberal bourgeois revolution would have come first by necessity).

Therefore, with Kautsky the assumption is that the will to live is the most fundamental human drive, and with civilisation this becomes the will to live better. Important for Kautsky this will is determined by external material circumstance rather than being ‘free’. The struggle for socialism emerges as the modern expression of this will to live, and the organisational form this struggle adopts, for Kautsky, is organised, methodical, and deliberate.

By contrast with this and with Lenin’s notion of a vanguard party leading the revolutionary movement, injecting socialist consciousness into it from outside, Luxemburg’s dialectic is more complex. For Luxemburg, at times revolutionary parties themselves need to adapt to working-class initiative, with working-class consciousness and action developing in a kind of school of class struggle. Regardless
of the growth in trade unions, Kautsky and Lenin were both adamant that trade-union methods alone could not deliver the working class from capitalism. Luxemburg agrees, but differs in her belief that social-democratic consciousness arises in and through the struggle and does not come entirely from without.

In retrospect, parts of Kautsky’s vision seem overly simplistic. Though his methodical, deliberate approach – his emphasis on organisation and consciousness reinforcing each other also has appeal still – potentially framing a counter-hegemonic struggle over decades, as opposed to the notion revolution would be quick and violent, and followed by extensive terror.

Meanwhile, according to Lenin the vanguard party enjoys a certain freedom in mobilising the collective will of the proletariat. There is even a significant degree of substitutionalism. The consequence of this, again, is the possibility of permanent revolution pressing transition by force of will rather than a predetermined and necessarily stage-based revolution that develops in relation to the growth of the productive forces and their attendant social relations. Though, in reality as Luxemburg grasped it, the vanguard was to replace the self-active proletariat in practice. Ultimately it would turn inwards against itself.

Taking into account all these perspectives, there is something to be learned from each of them, and that contributes to their legacies. From Kautsky we assume the need for organisation, discipline and patience; from Luxemburg the potential for spontaneity even in the context of a seemingly determinist view of socialism as necessity, and also the ways in which consciousness arises from the struggle itself. From Lenin we can observe the radical potential of the political will but also its risks.

**Orthodoxy versus Revisionism and Leftism**

Enquiring into the theme of orthodoxy/revisionism is also fruitful. Conflicting and mediating themes that arise in the context of such an enquiry include the following: Objectivism and subjectivism on the labour theory of value; sceptical empiricism versus the dialectical comprehension of totality; contingency versus teleology; capitalist collapse versus capitalist resilience and adaptation; and necessity versus choice.

As already noted, Bernstein threw into doubt the Marxian dialectic, philosophical materialism, theses of immiseration, class bifurcation and capitalist collapse, all the while recalibrating the labour theory of value and suggesting a peaceful gradualism, which supposedly renders a revolutionary political break redundant. Specifically, Bernstein’s revision of Marx’s labour theory of value involves a mixture of objectivist and subjectivist perspectives. The mechanism of surplus-value extraction is recognised, yet the various forms of labour are not considered equal.
Under the influence of empiricism, liberalism and eclecticism, Bernstein’s is a practical socialism, which leaves us an important legacy. He shows us that when necessary we must adapt theory to suit reality, rather than simply ignoring those facts that do not suit us.

Bernstein’s retention of a progressive/teleological outlook is less convincing in light of the Left’s defeats in recent decades. Therefore, an analysis of Bernstein in light of modern developments leads to an appreciation of the tension between the direction emerging from the capitalist tendencies identified by Marx, and the relative uncertainty of the ultimate direction of modern political economy. Importantly, while writing in the late nineteenth century, Bernstein did not deny the prospect of capitalist collapse precipitating socialist transition into the distant future, though peaceful evolution was his preference and hope (Bernstein, pp 208-209). Capitalism was to face existential crises relatively sooner rather than later, with the ravages of world wars, and the onset of the Great Depression.

Bernstein retains a productive engagement with the Marxian orthodoxy and, therefore, his outlook should be viewed as the product of a mediation between that orthodoxy, and the process of revision. Among that which Bernstein retains from Marx we can highlight the following: The falling rate of profit; overproduction; cyclical crises and periodic diminution of capital; the concentration and centralization of industrial capital; and the increase of the rate of surplus value. These things should not be discounted. To Bernstein, then, also fell the task of preserving so much from Marx, adapting it for a more gradualist and liberal democratic socialism, and that itself is a great and lasting legacy. By contrast, Luxemburg’s notion of the necessity of socialism stemming from capitalist contradictions appears more credible in light of the war and the Depression that was to follow, both during her own lifetime and after she was murdered. For Luxemburg, the capitalist system simply had not fully matured, but when it was fully developed it would no longer have anywhere to turn in its search for new markets. By contrast, Bernstein relegates capitalist collapse and terminal crisis “to the time when the world market has been fully developed” which is “a flight into the next world” (Bernstein, pp 84-87).

Without the presupposition of objective necessity, Luxemburg regrets that socialism is reduced to an ideal and a utopia (Luxemburg in Hudis and Anderson, pp 134, 141–142). Hence, the tension between idealist utopianism and scientific socialism, but this rejection of the centrality of the moral ought of socialism is a weakness in Luxemburg, and equally so with other Marxists such as Kautsky.

For Luxemburg the consequences of capitalism were manifold. Because of the tendency towards monopoly, capitalism was bound to become increasingly undemocratic even in the context of gains such as the suffrage, and because of the
systemic imperative to conquer new markets to retain profitability there was the potential for conflict to re-emerge between great (imperialist) economic powers.

Also important in grasping the scope of the orthodoxy versus revisionism and leftism opposition is the matter of whether or not totality can be grasped with dialectical materialist theory, and Marx’s dialectical materialism specifically. While Kautsky and Luxemburg assert that Marx had grasped the laws of motion of economy and society, Bernstein questions the capacity of Marxism to grasp totality via the dialectical materialist method. Indeed, he casts doubt on the capacity of any theory to achieve this. His is an empiricist perspective informed by a sceptical epistemology. That is to say, he believes in that which can be verified through experience, through the senses. He holds that there are very significant limitations to that which can thus be grasped. While Engels also supports the evidence of sensory perception, unlike Engels, Bernstein disputes the assertion that Marx’s dialectic had comprehensively grasped the movement of history. Specifically, Bernstein questions Marx’s historical/dialectical materialism as expressed through his analysis of the evolving mode and means of production. For Marx, this is a process driven overwhelmingly through the dynamic of class struggle. For Bernstein, despite the genuine role of class struggle, history and totality are more complex than this. So, for instance, the political is not of a secondary order resting upon and determined in a mono-linear manner by the economic base.

We can compare Bernstein’s position and that of other Marxists in a process of mediation that potentially can lead to the view that while there is some total ensemble of social relations, nonetheless it cannot be grasped comprehensively and finally by any single theory. While it includes class struggle, it cannot be reduced to it. Simply put, totality is just too complicated and, over decades and centuries, too prone to change. Acceptance of contingency means regardless of the various interpenetrating systemic logics, there is nonetheless an element of unpredictability. This was grasped by Anthony Giddens, though perhaps Giddens underestimates the power of systemic logics and the difficulties of collective-will formation amidst the many and varied modern forms of ideological and psychological manipulation.

Also of great interest in analysing the tensions between reformism, revisionism, and revolution, the post-Marxist scholars Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau have made the crucial assertion that it is a mistake to sweepingly “[identify] reformism with revisionism” and that “what is essential in a reformist practice is political quietism and the corporatist confinement of the working class”. Their suggestion is that Bernstein can be interpreted in a revisionist/revolutionary manner, and that he can be interpreted in fashion at odds with reformism (Mouffe and Laclau, pp 29-35). There are also arguments that later, in Sweden, the corporatist arrangements identified by some were alternatively seen by others as a “democratic class struggle” (Korpi, 1983, pp 7-25).


Liberty and Civil Rights versus Authoritarianism and Terror

The theme of socialist libertarianism or liberalism versus socialist authoritarianism must also be considered to glean the array of potential insights from the history of the movement. We have observed how Bernstein attempted to reconcile left-liberalism with Marxism in the context of evolutionary gradualism, with a rejection of the authoritarian methods of any proletarian dictatorship. While Kautsky remained committed to political and social revolution as a qualitative break, he rose to become one of the most vociferous Marxist critics of Bolshevist authoritarianism.

As suggested, Kautsky opposed dictatorship as a form of government in the practical sense, as the dictatorship of a party-elite or as the dictatorship of an individual. The democratic majority-rule of the working class was another thing and, indeed, many have interpreted Marx’s notion of proletarian dictatorship in this way: As a manner of applying democracy. Yet, Kautsky and also Martov preferred to preserve the liberal rights of minorities (including the bourgeoisie), even in the midst of vigorous class struggles. Kautsky’s position is encapsulated by a reiteration here of his statement that democratic processes, rights and institutions were together “what light and air are [to] the organism”, “without them it cannot develop its strength”. Kautsky was confident that the political revolution would raise the prospect of “higher forms of the class war; “a fight of organised, enlightened masses, steady and deliberate” (Kautsky, ‘The Social Revolution’, 1902, pp 39–40).

Kautsky, perhaps depending on the opinions and interpretations of his friends in the Menshevik movement, was not fully appreciative of the obstacles and threats confronting the Bolsheviks. In the final instance Kautsky was vindicated, however. He was correct in stating that the damage done by the object lesson of the Red Terror, taken to extremes under Stalin, was so harmful to the reputation of Marxism that even the great prize of sustained state power was insufficient to justify the associated actions. Kautsky had warned of the spectre of ‘Bonapartism’ and, indeed, the regime that did finally prevail was so inhumane that the term would not do justice to its victims. Kautsky and Martov, in taking a stand against unrestrained terror and repression, provided their own object lesson – one that preserved the integrity of radical social democracy.

Similarly, and as noted, Luxemburg is also well remembered for her democratic left-libertarian critique of Bolshevist centralism. Her words came to be seen as prophetic in light of the rise of Stalinism. In different ways Bernstein, Kautsky and Luxemburg worked to salvage the perceived integrity of various currents in Marxism as against the consequences of the ‘whatever it takes’ attitude of Bolshevism. This is a significant legacy.

Otto Bauer and other Austro-Marxists attempted a conciliation of democracy and revolution through strategies of dual power intended to provide a guarantee for the
democratic path. In this the legacy left by their example is both inspirational and also a warning. Democratic gains are not necessarily permanent. If the enemies of progressive social democracy develop a monopoly over the legitimate means of violence, including via the state power, then there is no guarantee for democracy or civil liberties. Here the examples and critiques of Kautsky, Bernstein, Luxemburg, and the Austro-Marxists stand as a redeeming legacy of a democratic socialist tradition, which so often has been unjustly tarred with the same brush as Stalinism.

**Elaborating on the Interplay of the Themes of Structure and Agency**

For Mouffe and Laclau, writing around a century after Kautsky developed his perspective, Kautsky’s analysis is one of “simplification” with regards class bifurcation, and “instrumentalism” with regards the state. They accuse him of developing a position endowed with the “internal rationality and intelligibility of a closed paradigm” (Mouffe and Laclau, pp 14-16). However, in the same work, Mouffe and Laclau exhibit a degree of doubt with regards their own radical voluntarism. They concede that their project – one of radical voluntarism and contingency, a project that denies political closure – will nonetheless be affected by “a set of structural limits established by other logics – at the level of state apparatuses, the economy, and so on” – thus the rejection of a utopianism that neglects to recognise these structural logics (Mouffe and Laclau, p 190).

If structure and agency condition each other, this allows for systems and sub-systems involving their own internal logics but also impacting upon, and sometimes conflicting with one another. Yet, allowing for agency, there is also the potential for collective free-will mobilisation to intervene in this process and to alter the consequent outcomes. Here there are parallels in my approach with Mouffe and Laclau, but also with Giddens’s critique of historical materialism and theory of structuration.

The motives behind the various struggles that animate the world are diverse. There is Kautsky’s will to live, or his will to live better as expressed both by individuals and collectives. However, struggles can also involve principles other than material wealth and well-being – such as political, cultural, spiritual freedom, and it can involve the motive of altruism and love for others beyond individual or collective self-interest. The diversity of motives and the diversity of ideals of ‘the good society’ means that social development is not entirely predictable (again a parallel with Giddens). In Mouffe’s words, social relations are not ‘sutured’, and despite the powerful logic of capitalism there are openings that can become focus points for collective will formation and counter-hegemonic strategies. Collective will formation has the potential for disrupting, altering or overcoming existing systems and sub-systems.
Capitalists have responded to pressures for systemic reproduction, expansion into new markets, and intensified exploitation, and often in tandem with national political classes that seek position in the economic world order. Often, this has involved an intensification of imperialism, and the hegemony of the super-powers and their allies – with the exploitation of Third World labourers or, as Wallerstein would call them, peripheral economies (Wallerstein, I and Hopkins, 1996 pp 3-10; Wallerstein, 2007, pp 11-12) – providing the material basis to integrate First World labour through relative prosperity. That is, prosperous workers are won over to capitalism by way of that prosperity even if they face injustice and exploitation. Importantly, Kautsky anticipated the future possibility of ultra-imperialism with global bourgeois co-operation and inter-mediation ending war between great powers (though not class struggle).

At the same time even within the First World itself, which Wallerstein would call “core economies” (Wallerstein, 2007, pp 11-12), there is an intensification of the rate of exploitation. Fundamental rights of labour, to pay, conditions, hours, holidays, age of retirement are in the process of being curtailed in order to provide an expansion of purchasing power, and hence of markets necessary for capitalist reproduction. Another consequence is the growth of additional reserves for investment. Corporate welfare is also provided for through effective subsidies arising from the tax mix, labour market deregulation and from broader austerity.

Collective will formation and the political/economic struggles of organised workers and citizens have the potential to disrupt or recast this logic, with internal capitalist dynamics and class struggle impacting upon each other. Because confrontation is often costly to both parties, as Korpi recognised, this can lead to a series of historic compromises based on “the existing equilibrium of class forces” and as Vandenberg calls it, “the logic of the situation of class struggle”. This progresses over decades, mediating but not negating the class struggle (Pierson, pp 112-113; Vandenberg, p 39; Ryner, p 59). This idea of an equilibrium was also found in Otto Bauer, for instance.

So, returning to Bernstein momentarily, similar to radical Swedish democratic revisionism, Bernstein does not abandon the class struggle either, contrary to the assertions of some important theorists (e.g., Sheri Berman, pp 14-15) Indeed, Bernstein’s perspective remains a teleological one. That is, he believes history has a direction and that direction is one of progress, a process partly informed by the class struggle. Here he is at odds with Swedish democratic socialist Ernst Wigforss, who also accounts for the political dead ends and defeats (Wigforss in Vandenberg, p 100).

Between thinkers such as Marx, Engels, Bernstein, Luxemburg and Kautsky can be observed the interaction of each of their perspectives, such as to arrive at a synthesis – an appreciation of the complexity of totality (all too complex to grasp in a single theory, or specifically by Marxism). Nevertheless, the usefulness of the Marxian dialectical materialist method with its emphasis on the mode of production and class
struggle is apparent. When brought into mediation with Bernstein’s eclectic empiricism, a synthesis emerges, within which the Marxist method is a useful frame for understanding, although not an exhaustive frame.

There is a legacy, indeed, that the likes of Bernstein, Kautsky, Luxemburg and others have provided, as reference points for the exploration of philosophical questions of relevance to the Left still. Again, this includes our understanding of such categories of totality, teleology, system and determinism versus contingency, free will, imagination and voluntarism. Through reading these perspectives we gain insight into these themes, their mediation of each other, and the emergence of useful syntheses.

**The Relativities of Third Roads and Third Ways**

This thesis has argued that during the 1848-1934 period there existed an array of Third Roads and Third Ways in various traditions of Marxism, including but not limited to the contributions of Kautsky, the early Bernstein, and Luxemburg. The thesis has also considered the contributions of Ferdinand Lassalle and (the later) Eduard Bernstein, which could arguably be interpreted as Third Ways. Whether the later Bernstein is to be considered a Marxist is debatable and contested. For the purposes of this thesis, I have argued that the period 1848-1934 is marked by shifting relativities.

Third Roads and Third Ways developed in relation to the evolving Second Way as well as in relation to each other. Hence, Marxism and Lassalleanism (along with various anarchisms, and Kantian-ethical socialisms) fight for dominance on the radical Left; but Marxism prevails decisively in 1891 with the acceptance by the German Social Democrats of the Erfurt Programme. This begins a period of orthodox Marxist supremacy; with Bernstein’s revisionism emerging as a Third Way relative to that orthodoxy.

More specifically, radical Marxist social democracy developed during the mid- to late-nineteenth century, thanks largely to the efforts of Engels (after Marx’s death); and after Engels, the passing of the baton to Karl Kautsky – the so-called Red Pope and the keeper of the orthodoxy. During this period, revolutionary social-democratic Marxism wrestled with other trends such as the anarchisms of Proudhon and Bakunin, the Hegelian socialism of Lassalle, and various attempts to fuse Marxism with Kantian idealism. However, with the Erfurt Programme of 1891, Marxism had eclipsed Lassalleanism in the SPD (German Social Democrats). Though competing tendencies persisted, Marxist revolutionary social democracy emerged as the dominant Second Way, that is, the dominant left-revolutionary discourse.

During the early twentieth century, Kautsky adopted a centrist posture as against various revisionisms (including Bernstein) and the leftist challenge emanating from
Rosa Luxemburg among others. One of the most important threats to the orthodoxy emerged only very gradually, with the German Social Democrats increasingly integrated via nationalism, militarism, and concessions in the industrial sphere as well as the sphere of welfare. Kautsky’s *The Road to Power* was rejected by SPD pragmatists in 1909. By 1914, the majority right Social Democrats had committed fully to world war. When Kautsky, Bernstein and others overcame their original equivocations and confusion and started to organise against the war, they were expelled from the party. Hence the state of affairs characterised by orthodox hegemony on the Left (especially in Germany) continued until World War I, after which the Kautskyan orthodoxy – now taking on a centrist guise – retreated under pressure from both the Left (under the Bolshevist leadership of Lenin) and the right (militarist/nationalist/opportunist social democracy).

In 1917, everything changed quite rapidly. The successful Russian Revolution arose as a pole of attraction for Marxist revolutionaries the world over. Lenin launched a pitiless attack against the centrists and Kautsky more than anyone. Kautsky’s earlier equivocations on the war were exploited to the maximum. A shift took place throughout Europe with the rise of various communist parties adopting Leninist organisational, tactical and strategic principles. Again, the orthodox revolutionary Marxist social democracy persisted in places, for instance with Austro-Marxism, and with the USPD (Independent German Social Democrats), who later re-merged with the mainstream SPD. However, Bolshevism, and then Stalinism, emerged as the dominant left-revolutionary discourses and movement. (Emphasized here is the year 1924, as the year of Lenin’s death, though Trotsky and later Bukharin persisted for some time thereafter.)

Orthodoxy, centrism, Austro-Marxism, Luxemburgism. All thereafter could be considered relative Third Roads – that is, Third Roads as opposed to Third Ways, because they maintained the Marxist/communist final goal – although this also is questionable if one queries the Stalinists’ commitment to the principles and final goal of Marxian communism. In which case again we would consider them Third Way activists at odds with the Stalinist dominance on the revolutionary Left. Austro-Marxism especially enjoyed important insights even before the crucial 1914 disjuncture. While the post-war Austro-Marxists developed insightful critiques of the nature of Stalinism, they also attempted to heal the rift within international socialism. Specifically, their growth from within and protracted dual power strategies comprised crucial innovations for which they could be considered as representing a socialist Third Way for their time. The example of those innovations provides a legacy that is of enduring value.
Afterward – Final Observations

Teleology and/or necessity are accepted by all our main thinkers in various ways. Even Bernstein, who came to reject the centrality of the class struggle as a grand dialectical process (though not rejecting class struggle per se) held to a notion of necessary progress. Such assumptions no longer seem tenable. A progressive teleology cannot be taken for granted. Socialism is not inevitable as the consequence of the core class-struggle dialectic. History and the social forces contesting it are complex and plural. History is not ‘sutured’ (Mouffe). We are at the same time subjected to social logics and systems greater than ourselves, and we are complicit in the interpretation, reproduction and sometimes even the transformation of those logics. Giddens refers to this as the “duality of structure”. Here our participation, the participation of active and knowing agents and collective actors, means that the consequences of contending forces in any given social conjuncture cannot be taken for granted. Structure and agency condition each other: There is free will, and outcomes are at times unpredictable. As Giddens put it, “the structured properties of social systems are simultaneously the medium and outcome of social acts” (Giddens, pp 19–20).

Collective will formation often means swimming against the tide, and there are times, perhaps, when both Giddens and Mouffe underplay the power of social and economic logics, for instance those associated with the reproduction of capitalist social relations. Hence Marx himself and those who followed, like Kautsky, assisted in the mobilisation of those social forces that actually put paid to their social prophecies over the course of the twentieth century. This occurred through the ameliorative consequences of Western welfare states. Meanwhile Austro-Marxism occupied a position of strength, including a foothold in the state apparatus itself – and yet faltered and floundered at crucial conjunctures, the consequence of mistaken political strategy and tactics, and/or loss of nerve or resolve.

Power is everywhere in the analysis of the Third Way and Third Road writers: both positive (enabling) and negative (repressive) power. For instance, Marxism mainly perceives state power as a repressive force, but for Lassalle the state emerges as a positive enabler, a force against poverty and ignorance. Hence we return to the problems with a narrow class-struggle dialectic, and the underplaying of national, political, racial, spiritual and religious factors (and by the same token the modern progressive discourse which relegates class and economic democracy to the too-hard basket).

In mediating various themes and contested ideologies, all these Third Road and Third Way theorists developed important insights, ranging across the nature of nationalism to debates on free will versus philosophical and historical materialism; and debates on the blurring of the lines between reform and revolution, or alternatively their stark
opposition to each other. At times, attempts were made towards conciliation, such as the Austro-Marxists’ attempts to merge revolutionary enthusiasm and realpolitik.

Centrist, ethical or even liberal socialism on the one hand – and these are not all the one thing – were opposed to the extreme ends and means calculations (Steger) made by the Bolsheviks on the other. And to a large extent mainstream social democracy capitulated in the face of the Great War, and in the case of German right-wing social democracy, embraced militarism fully. Socialist authoritarianism emerging from Bolshevism was intended as a temporary but necessary aberration but became permanent with Stalin. However, through the course of the twentieth century democratic socialism and social democracy were progressively purged of Marxist or radical content. Though In the time frame we are dealing with (up to 1934) there remained radical currents still adhering to Marxism, such as the Austro-Marxists.

Yet, as we have observed, the Third Roads and Third Ways of the 1848-1934 were many and diverse. In relative terms, different movements emerged as Third Roads and Third Ways throughout this time. Most notable was the rise and decline of the classical orthodoxy as the relative Second Way, but there was also its re-conceptualization as a Third Road, both through the efforts of Kautsky and of the Austro-Marxists. The movements considered during this period have left a substantial legacy. Much of that legacy is redemptive as well. Not only are there lessons to be learned from the mistakes of the past, enduring concepts and frameworks may be applied to today’s conditions. Socialism can also be reclaimed in the name of radical and democratic traditions such as those advanced by the authors and political movements examined in this thesis. In certain ways, the New Left and Eurocommunism attempted this but were themselves exhausted with the co-option of and integration of identity-based movements by liberal capitalism, and the emptying out of social democracy with the rise of new Third Way movements and ideologies that bore little resemblance to those studied here.

The many and varied ways in which Third Roads and Third Ways developed relative to each other, and relative to unevenly dominant Second Ways demonstrates the flexibility with which a plurality of progressive perspectives might be constructed. The Third Ways of Giddens, Blair and others in their company that emerged during the 1990s, inspired by the pragmatic politics of the Australian Labor Party, have largely been emptied of radical content. The Third Roads and Third Ways of the 1848-1934 period have left to us a substantial legacy, however. They retain their force as possible sources of inspiration and instruction for a modern democratic Left turning back to engage with its roots. They provide signposts towards potentially rich, radical Third Roads or Third Ways. This is a highly significant legacy.
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Trotksy Quote in Chapter 8 [http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Leon_Trotsky](http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Leon_Trotsky)