

The Rosa Luxemburg Reader

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5—Social Reform or Revolution

EDITORS' NOTE: *Social Reform or Revolution*, Luxemburg's famous critique of Eduard Bernstein's revisionism, first appeared as a series of articles in *Leipziger Volkszeitung* in September 1898 and April 1899. Bernstein (1850–1932) was a leading figure in the German socialist movement who had been named Marx's literary executor by Frederick Engels while in exile in England in the 1890s. Bernstein's advocacy of revisionist views after Engels' death stunned many at the time, given his leading role in the Second International. The controversy was initiated by Bernstein's publication of several essays during the years 1896–98 under the title "Problems of Socialism" in *Neue Zeit*, the main theoretical journal of German Social Democracy. Bernstein called for a reappraisal of many of Marx's concepts in light of the presumed stability of capitalism and the growth of Social Democracy, earning him the appellation "revisionist." Though Luxemburg was not the first to attack Bernstein's effort to revise the basic tenets of Marxism, her analysis was the most comprehensive and her critique of Bernstein established her as a major figure in German Social Democracy and the Second International as a whole.

Luxemburg's critique of Bernstein, part of which first appeared in *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, was reprinted in book form as Part I of *Social Reform or Revolution* in 1899, along with a Part II that critiqued Bernstein's book *Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie*, published earlier in 1899. (Bernstein's book is available in English under the title *Evolutionary Socialism*.) A second edition of *Reform or Revolution*, which contained a number of revisions and corrections by Luxemburg, was published in 1908. This translation by Dick Howard follows the text of the 1899 edition, but incorporates changes from the second edition. Passages eliminated in the second edition are in brackets; passages added to the second edition are in the endnotes.

PREFACE

At first view, the title of this work may be surprising. Social reform or revolution? Can Social Democracy be *against* social reforms? Can it *oppose* social

revolution, the transformation of the existing order, its final goal, to social reforms? Certainly not. The practical daily struggle for reforms, for the amelioration of the condition of the workers within the framework of the existing social order, and for democratic institutions, offers Social Democracy the only means of engaging in the proletarian class struggle and working in the direction of the final goal—the conquest of political power and the suppression of wage labor. For Social Democracy there exists an indissoluble tie between social reforms and revolution. The struggle for reforms is its *means*; the social revolution, its *goal*.

It is in Eduard Bernstein's theory, presented in his articles on "Problems of Socialism," in the *Neue Zeit* of 1897–1898, and especially in his book, *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie* [The Presuppositions of Socialism and the Tasks of Social Democracy],¹ that we find, for the first time, the opposition of the two moments of the labor movement. His theory tends to counsel the renunciation of the social transformation, the final goal of Social Democracy, and, inversely, to make social reforms, which are the *means* of the class struggle, into its *end*. Bernstein himself formulated this viewpoint very clearly and precisely when he wrote: "The final goal, whatever it may be, is nothing to me; the movement is everything."

But since the final goal of socialism is the only decisive factor distinguishing the Social Democratic movement from bourgeois democracy and from bourgeois radicalism, the only factor transforming the entire labor movement from a vain effort to repair the capitalist order into a class struggle *against* this order, for the suppression of this order—the question "Reform or Revolution?" as it is posed by Bernstein is, for Social Democracy, the same as the question "To be or not to be?" In the controversy with Bernstein and his followers, everybody in the Party ought to understand clearly that it is not a question of this or that method of struggle, or of the use of this or that *tactic*, but of the very *existence* of the Social Democratic movement.

[From a casual consideration of Bernstein's theory, this may appear to be an exaggeration. Does he not continually mention Social Democracy and its aims? Does he not repeat again and again, and explicitly, that he too strives toward the final goal of socialism, but in another way? Does he not stress particularly that he fully approves of the present practice of Social Democracy? That is all true, to be sure. But it is also true that every new movement, when it first elaborates its theory and policy, begins by finding support in the preceding movement, though it may be in direct contradiction with the latter. It begins by suiting itself to the forms already at hand, and by speaking the language which was

spoken. In time, the new grain breaks through the old husk, and the new movement finds its own forms and its own language.

To expect an opposition against scientific socialism at its beginning to express itself clearly, fully, and to the last consequence; to expect it to *deny* openly and bluntly the theoretical basis of Social Democracy—would be to underrate the power of scientific socialism. Today, he who would pass as a socialist, and at the same time would declare war on the Marxian doctrine, the most stupendous product of the human mind in this century, must begin with involuntary esteem for Marxism. He must begin by acknowledging himself its disciple, by seeking in Marx's own teachings the points of support for an attack on them, representing this attack as a further development of Marxian doctrine. For this reason, unconcerned by its outer forms, one must pick out the sheathed kernel of Bernstein's theory. This is a matter of urgent necessity for the broad strata of the industrial proletariat in our party.

No coarser insult, no baser defamation, can be thrown against the workers than the remark "Theoretical controversies are only for intellectuals." Lasalle² once said: "Only when science and the workers, these opposed poles of society, become one will they crush in their arms of steel all obstacles to culture." The entire strength of the modern labor movement rests on theoretical knowledge.

But this knowledge is doubly important for the workers in the present case, because it is precisely they and their influence in the movement that are in the balance here. It is their skin that is being brought to market. The opportunist current in the Party, whose theory is formulated by Bernstein, is nothing but an unconscious attempt to assure the predominance of the petty-bourgeois elements that have entered our Party, to change the policy and aims of our Party in their direction. The question of reform and revolution, of the final goal and the movement, is, in another form, the question of the *petty-bourgeois or proletarian character of the labor movement*.

It is, therefore, in the interest of the proletarian mass of the Party to become acquainted, actively and in detail, with the present theoretical controversy with opportunism. As long as theoretical knowledge remains the privilege of a handful of "intellectuals" in the Party, it will face the danger of going astray. Only when the great mass of workers take in their own hands the keen and dependable weapons of scientific socialism will all the petty-bourgeois inclinations, all the opportunist currents, come to naught. The movement will then find itself on sure and firm ground. "Quantity will do it."]

1. THE OPPORTUNIST METHOD

If it is true that theories are reflections in the human consciousness of the phenomena of the external world, then it must be added, concerning Eduard Bernstein's theory, that these theories are sometimes inverted images. Think of a theory of instituting socialism by means of social reform in face of the complete stagnation of the reform movement in Germany. Think of a theory of trade-union control over production in face of the defeat of the metal workers in England. Consider the theory of winning a majority in parliament after the revision of the constitution of Saxony and the most recent attempts against universal suffrage. However, in our opinion, the pivotal point of Bernstein's system is not located in his conception of the practical tasks of Social Democracy. It is found in what he says about the course of the objective development of capitalist society which, of course, is closely bound to his conception of the practical tasks of Social Democracy.

According to Bernstein, a general breakdown of capitalism is increasingly improbable because, on the one hand, capitalism shows a greater capacity of adaptation and, on the other hand, capitalist production becomes more and more varied. The capacity of capitalism to adapt itself, says Bernstein, is manifested, first, in the disappearance of general crises thanks to the development of the credit system, employers' organizations,³ wider means of communication and informational services. It shows itself, secondly, in the tenacity of the middle classes, which follows from the continual differentiation of the branches of production and the elevation of vast strata of the proletariat into the middle class. It is furthermore proved, argues Bernstein, by the amelioration of the economic and political situation of the proletariat as a result of the trade-union struggle.

From this is derived the following general conclusion about the practical struggle of Social Democracy. It must not direct its activity toward the conquest of political power but toward the improvement of the condition of the working class. It must not expect to institute socialism as a result of a political and social crisis but by means of the progressive extension of social control and the gradual application of the principle of cooperation.

Bernstein himself sees nothing new in his theories. On the contrary, he believes them to be in agreement with certain declarations of Marx and Engels, as well as with the general direction of Social Democracy up to the present. Nevertheless, it seems to us that it is difficult to deny that they are in fundamental contradiction with the conceptions of scientific socialism.

If Bernstein's revisionism consisted only in affirming that the march of capitalist development is slower than was thought before, he would merely be presenting an argument for adjourning the conquest of power by the proletariat on which up to now everybody agreed. Its only practical consequence would be a slowing down of the pace of the struggle.

But that is not the case. What Bernstein questions is not the rapidity of the development of capitalist society but the path of the development itself and, consequently, the transition to socialism.

Socialist theory up to now declared that the point of departure for a transformation to socialism would be a general and catastrophic crisis. We must distinguish two things in this theory: the fundamental idea and its external form. The fundamental idea consists in the affirmation that, as a result of its own inner contradictions, capitalism moves toward a point when it will be unbalanced, when it will simply become impossible. There were good reasons for thinking of that juncture in the form of a catastrophic general commercial crisis. But, nonetheless, that is of secondary importance and inessential to the fundamental idea.

As is well known, the scientific basis of socialism rests on *three* results of capitalist development. First, and most important, on the growing *anarchy* of the capitalist economy, leading inevitably to its ruin. Second, on the progressive *socialization* of the process of production, which creates the germs of the future social order. And third, on the growing *organization and class consciousness* of the proletariat, which constitutes the active factor in the coming revolution.

Bernstein eliminates the first of the three fundamental supports of scientific socialism. He says that capitalist development does not lead to a general economic collapse.

He does not merely reject a certain form of the collapse but the collapse itself. He says, textually: "One could object that by collapse of the present society is meant something else than a general commercial crisis worse than all others, namely, a complete collapse of the capitalist system brought about as a result of its own contradictions." And to this he replies: "With the growing development of society, a complete and almost general collapse of the present system of production becomes not more but less probable because capitalist development increases, on the one hand, the capacity of adaptation and, on the other—that is, at the same time—the differentiation of industry."⁴

But then the important question arises: Why and how shall we attain the final goal of our efforts? From the standpoint of scientific socialism, the historical necessity of the socialist revolution manifests itself above all in the

growing anarchy of capitalism which drives the system into an impasse. But if one admits, with Bernstein, that capitalist development does not move in the direction of its own ruin, then socialism ceases to be *objectively necessary*. There remain only the other two mainstays of the scientific explanation of socialism, which are also consequences of the capitalist order: the socialization of the process of production and the class consciousness of the proletariat. It is these that Bernstein has in mind when he says that with the elimination of the breakdown theory "the socialist doctrine loses nothing of its power of persuasion. For, examined closely, what are all the factors enumerated by us that make for the suppression or the modification of the former crises? Nothing else, in fact, than the preconditions, or even in part the germs, of the socialization of production and exchange."⁵

Very little reflection is needed to see that this too is a false conclusion. Where does the importance of all the phenomena which Bernstein says are the means of capitalist adaptation—cartels, the credit system, the development of means of communication, the amelioration of the situation of the working class, etc.—lie? Obviously in that they eliminate or, at least, attenuate the internal contradictions of capitalist economy, and stop the development or the aggravation of these contradictions. Thus the elimination of crises means the suppression of the antagonism between production and exchange on the capitalist base. The amelioration of the situation of the working class, or the penetration of certain fractions of that class into the middle layers, means the attenuation of the antagonism between capital and labor. But if the cartels, credit system, trade unions, etc., suppress the capitalist contradictions and consequently save the system from ruin; if they enable capitalism to maintain itself—and that is why Bernstein calls them "means of adaptation"—how can they be at the same time "the preconditions and even in part the germs" of socialism? Obviously only in the sense that they express more clearly the social character of production. But, inversely, by maintaining it in its capitalist form, the same factors render superfluous in equal measure the transformation of this socialized production into socialist production. That is why they can be the germs or preconditions of a socialist order only in a conceptual sense and not in an historical sense. They are phenomena which, in the light of our conception of socialism, we *know* to be related to socialism but which, in fact, not only do not lead to a socialist revolution but, on the contrary, render it superfluous. There remains only one foundation of socialism—the class consciousness of the proletariat. But it, too, is in the given case not the simple intellectual reflection of the ever growing contradictions of capitalism and its

approaching decline—for this decline is prevented by the means of adaptation. It is now a mere ideal whose force of persuasion rests only on the perfections attributed to it.

What we have here, in brief, is the foundation of the socialist program by means of “pure reason.” We have here, to use simpler language, an idealist explanation of socialism. The objective necessity of socialism, the explanation of socialism as the result of the material development of society, falls away.

Revisionist theory stands before an Either/Or. Either the socialist transformation is, as was admitted up to now, the consequence of the internal contradictions of the capitalist order—then with this order will develop its contradictions, resulting inevitably, at some point, in its collapse. In this case, however, the “means of adaptation” are ineffective, and the breakdown theory is correct. Or, the “means of adaptation” are really capable of stopping the breakdown of the capitalist system and thereby enable capitalism to maintain itself by suppressing its own contradictions. In that case, *socialism* ceases to be an historical necessity. It then becomes anything you want to call it, except the result of the material development of society.

This dilemma leads to another. Either revisionism is correct concerning the course of capitalist development, and therefore the socialist transformation of society becomes a utopia. Or socialism is not a utopia; and therefore the theory of the “means of adaptation” is false. “*Das ist die Frage*, that is the question.”

THE ADAPTATION OF CAPITALISM

According to Bernstein, the credit system, the improved means of communication and the new employers’ organizations are the important means that bring about the adaptation of the capitalist economy.

Let us begin with credit. Credit has diverse functions in the capitalist economy. Its two most important functions, as is well known, are to increase the capacity to expand production and to facilitate exchange. When the inner tendency of capitalist production to expand limitlessly strikes against the barrier of private property (the limited size of private capital), credit appears as a means of surmounting these limits in a capitalist manner. Through stock companies, credit combines in one mass a large number of individual capitals. It makes available to each capitalist the use of other capitalists’ money—in the form of industrial credit. Further, as commercial credit, it accelerates the exchange of commodities and therefore the return of capital into production, and thus aids the entire cycle of the process of production.

The effect of these two principal functions of credit on the formation of crises is quite obvious. If it is true that crises appear as a result of the contradiction between the capacity for expansion, the tendency of production to increase, and the restricted consumption capacity, then in view of what was stated above, credit is precisely the specific means of making this contradiction break out as often as possible. First of all, it immensely increases the capacity for the expansion of production, and thus constitutes an inner driving force that constantly pushes production to exceed the limits of the market. But credit strikes from two sides. After having (as a factor of the process of production) provoked overproduction, credit (as mediator of the process of exchange) destroys, during the crisis, the very productive forces it itself created. At the first symptom of the stagnation, credit melts away. It abandons the exchange process just when it is still indispensable, and where it still exists, it shows itself instead ineffective and useless, and thus during the crisis it reduces the consumption capacity of the market to a minimum.

Besides these two principal results, credit also influences the formation of crises in many other ways. It offers not only the technical means of making available to an entrepreneur the capital of other owners, but at the same time stimulates bold and unscrupulous utilization of the property of others. That is, it leads to reckless speculation. Not only does credit aggravate the crisis in its capacity as a dissembled means of exchange; it also helps to bring on and extend the crisis by transforming all exchange into an extremely complex and artificial mechanism which, having a minimum of metallic money as a real base, is easily disarranged at the slightest occasion.

Thus, far from being a means for the elimination or the attenuation of crises, credit is, on the contrary, a particularly powerful factor in the formation of crises. This could not possibly be otherwise. Speaking very generally, the specific function of credit is nothing but the elimination of the remaining rigidity of capitalist relationships. It introduces everywhere the greatest elasticity possible. It renders all capitalist forces extendable, relative, and sensitive to the highest degree. Doing this, it facilitates and aggravates crises, which are nothing but the periodic collisions of the contradictory forces of the capitalist economy.

This leads, at the same time, to another question. How can credit generally have the appearance of a “means of adaptation” of capitalism? No matter in what context or form this “adaptation” is conceived, its essence can obviously only be that one of the several antagonistic relations of capitalist economy is smoothed over, that one of its contradictions is suppressed or weakened, and

that thus liberty of movement is assured, at one point or another, to the otherwise fettered productive forces. In fact, it is precisely credit that aggravates these contradictions to the highest degree. It aggravates the antagonism between the *mode of production* and the *mode of exchange* by stretching production to the limit and at the same time paralyzing exchange on the smallest pretext. It increases the contradiction between the *mode of production* and the *mode of appropriation* by separating production from ownership, that is, by transforming the capital employed in production into "social" capital and at the same time transforming a part of the profit, in the form of interest on capital, into a simple title of ownership. It increases the contradiction between the *property relations* and the *relations of production* by putting immense productive forces into a small number of hands, and expropriating a large number of small capitalists. It increases the contradiction between the social character of production and capitalist *private ownership* by rendering necessary the intervention of the state in production (stock companies).

In short, credit reproduces all the fundamental contradictions of the capitalist world. It accentuates them. It precipitates their development and thus pushes the capitalist world forward to its own destruction—the breakdown. The prime act of capitalist adaptation, as far as credit is concerned, should really consist in breaking and *suppressing* credit. In fact, credit is far from being a means of capitalist adaptation. On the contrary, as it presently exists, it is a means of destruction of the most extreme revolutionary significance. Has not precisely this revolutionary character which leads the credit system beyond capitalism actually inspired plans of "socialist" reform? As such, it has had some distinguished proponents, some of whom (Isaac Pereire⁶ in France) were, as Marx put it, half prophets, half rogues.

On closer examination, the second "means of adaptation," *employers' organizations*, appears just as fragile. According to Bernstein, such organizations will put an end to anarchy of production and do away with crises through the regulation of production. It is true that the multiple economic repercussions of the development of cartels and trusts have not been studied too carefully up to now. But they represent a problem which can only be solved with the aid of Marxist theory.

One thing, at least, is certain. We could speak of a damming of capitalist anarchy by capitalist employers' organizations only in the measure that cartels, trusts, etc., become, even approximately, the dominant form of production. But such a possibility is excluded by the very nature of the cartels. The final economic aim and result of employers' organizations is the following.

Through the elimination of competition in a given branch of production, the distribution of the mass of profit realized on the market is influenced in such a manner that there is an increase in the share going to this branch of industry. Such organization can only increase the rate of profit in one branch of industry at the expense of another. That is precisely why it cannot be generalized; for when it is extended to all important branches of industry, this tendency cancels its own influence.

But even within the limits of their practical application, the result of employers' organizations is the very opposite of the elimination of industrial anarchy. Cartels ordinarily succeed in obtaining an increase of the rate of profit in the internal market at the cost of having to sell the product of the excess portion of their capital—that which couldn't be absorbed by the internal market—on foreign markets at a much lower rate of profit. That is to say, they sell abroad cheaper than at home. The result is the sharpening of competition abroad and an increased anarchy on the world market—the very opposite of what is intended. This is well demonstrated by the history of the international sugar industry.

Generally speaking, employers' organizations, as a manifestation of the capitalist mode of production, can only be considered a definite phase of capitalist development. In effect, cartels are fundamentally nothing but a means resorted to by the capitalist mode of production to hold back the fatal fall of the rate of profit in certain branches of production. What method do cartels employ to this end? It is, essentially, that of keeping inactive a part of the accumulated capital. That is, they use the same method which, in another form, comes into play during crises. The remedy and the illness resemble each other like two drops of water, and the former can be considered the lesser evil only up to a certain point. When the market outlets begin to shrink because the world market has been extended to its limit and has been exhausted by the competition of the capitalist countries—and it cannot be denied that sooner or later this is bound to occur—then the forced partial idleness of capital will reach such dimensions that the remedy will itself be transformed into an illness, and capital, already pretty much "socialized" through organization, will tend to revert again to the form of private capital. In the face of the increased difficulties of finding even a tiny place, each individual portion will prefer to take its chances alone. At that time, the [employers'] organizations will burst like soap bubbles and give way to free competition in an aggravated form.⁷

On the whole, cartels, just like credit, appear therefore as a determined phase of capitalist development which, in the last analysis, only aggravates the

anarchy of the capitalist world, expressing and ripening its internal contradictions. Cartels aggravate the contradiction between the mode of production and the mode of exchange by sharpening the struggle between producer and consumer, as is the case especially in the United States. Furthermore, they aggravate the contradiction between the mode of production and the mode of appropriation by opposing the superior force of organized capital to the working class in the most brutal fashion, and thus increasing the antagonism between capital and labor. Finally, capitalist cartels aggravate the contradiction between the international character of the capitalist world economy and the national character of the capitalist state insofar as they are always accompanied by a general tariff war which sharpens the differences among the capitalist states. We must add to this the decidedly revolutionary influence exercised by cartels on the concentration of production, technical progress, etc.

Thus, when evaluated from the angle of their final effect on the capitalist economy, cartels and trusts fail as "means of adaptation." They fail to attenuate the contradictions of capitalism. On the contrary, they appear to be a means which itself leads to greater anarchy. They encourage the further development of the internal contradictions of capitalism and accelerate the coming of a general decline of capitalism. . . .

There remains still another phenomenon which, says Bernstein, contradicts the course of capitalist development indicated above. In the "steadfast phalanx" of middle-size enterprises, Bernstein sees a sign that the development of large industry does not move in such a revolutionary direction, and is not as effective from the angle of the concentration of industry as was expected by the "breakdown theory." He is here, however, the victim of his own misunderstanding. To see the progressive disappearance of the middle-size enterprise as a necessary result of the development of large industry is, in effect, to misunderstand the nature of this process.

According to Marxist theory, small capitalists play the role of pioneers of technical revolution in the general course of capitalist development. They play that role in a double sense. They initiate new methods of production in old, well-established branches of industry, as well as being instrumental in the creation of new branches of production not yet exploited by the big capitalist. It is false to imagine that the history of the middle-size capitalist establishment proceeds unequivocally in the direction of their progressive disappearance. The course of their development is rather a purely dialectical one, and moves constantly among contradictions. The middle capitalist layers, just like the workers, find themselves under the influence of two antago-

nistic tendencies, one ascendant and the other descendent. In this case, the descendent tendency is the continued rise in the scale of production which periodically overflows the dimensions of the average-size capital and removes it repeatedly from the competitive terrain. The ascendant tendency is, first, the periodic depreciation of the existing capital which again lowers, for a certain time, the scale of production in proportion to the value of the necessary minimum amount of capital. It is also represented by the penetration of capitalist production into new spheres. The struggle of the average-size enterprise against big capital cannot be considered a regularly proceeding battle in which the troops of the weaker party continue to melt away directly and quantitatively. It should rather be regarded as a periodic mowing down of small capital, which rapidly grows up again only to be mowed down once more by large industry. The two tendencies play catch with the middle capitalist layers. As opposed to the development of the working class, the descending tendency must win, in the end. The victory of the descending tendency need not necessarily show itself in an absolute numerical diminution of the middle-size enterprises. It shows itself, first, in the progressive increase of the minimum amount of capital necessary for the functioning of the enterprises in the old branches of production; second, in the constant diminution of the interval of time during which the small capitalists conserve the opportunity to exploit the new branches of production. The result, as far as the small capitalist is concerned, is a progressively shorter duration of his economic life and an ever more rapid change in the methods of production and of investment; and, for the class as a whole, a more and more rapid acceleration of the social metabolism.

Bernstein knows this perfectly well; he himself comments on it. But what he seems to forget is that this very thing is the law of movement of the average capitalist enterprise. If small capitalists are the pioneers of technical progress, and if technical progress is the vital pulse of the capitalist economy, then it is manifest that small capitalists are an integral part of capitalist development. The progressive disappearance of the middle-size enterprise—in the absolute sense considered by Bernstein—would not mean, as he thinks, the revolutionary advance of capitalist development, but precisely the contrary, the cessation, the slowing down of this development. "The rate of profit, that is to say, the relative increase of capital," said Marx, "is important first of all for new investors of capital grouping themselves independently. And as soon as the formation of capital falls exclusively into the hands of a few big capitalists, the revivifying fire of production is extinguished. It dies away."⁸

[The Bernsteinian means of adaptation thus show themselves to be ineffective, and the phenomena which he considers to be symptoms of the adaptation must be pushed back to other causes. . . .]

PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES AND GENERAL CHARACTER OF REVISIONISM

In the first chapter, we attempted to show that Bernstein's theory lifts the program of the socialist movement off its material base and places it on an idealist basis. This concerns its theoretical foundation. How does this theory appear when translated into practice?

First, and formally, it does not differ in the least from the practice followed by Social Democracy up to now. Trade unions, the struggle for social reform and for the democratization of the political institutions are precisely that which constitutes the formal content of the activity of the Social Democratic Party. The difference is not in the *what* but in the *how*. At present, the trade-union and the parliamentary struggles are considered as means of gradually guiding and educating the proletariat for the taking of political power. From the revisionist standpoint, this conquest of power is impossible and useless; therefore, trade-union and parliamentary activity are to be carried on only for their immediate results, that is, the bettering of the material situation of the workers, the gradual reduction of capitalist exploitation and the extension of social control.

If we ignore the immediate amelioration of the workers' condition—an objective shared by the Party program and revisionism—the difference between the two conceptions is, in brief, the following. According to the current conception, the socialist significance of trade-union and parliamentary activity is that it prepares the proletariat—that is, the *subjective* factor of the socialist transformation—for the task of realizing socialism. According to Bernstein, the trade-union and political struggles gradually reduce capitalist exploitation itself, remove from capitalist society its capitalist character, and give it a socialist one. In a word, the two forms of struggle are said to realize the socialist transformation *in an objective sense*. Examined more closely, the two conceptions are diametrically opposed. In the current conception of our party, the proletariat becomes convinced of the impossibility of accomplishing fundamental social change as a result of its trade-union and parliamentary struggles and arrives at the conviction that these struggles cannot basically change its situation, and that the conquest of power is unavoidable. Bernstein's theory, however, begins by presupposing that the conquest of power is

impossible, and it concludes by affirming that the socialist order can only be introduced as a result of the trade-union struggle and parliamentary activity.

As seen by Bernstein, trade-union and parliamentary action has a socialist character because it exercises a progressively socializing influence on the capitalist economy. We tried to show that this influence is purely imaginary. The structures of capitalist property and the capitalist state develop in entirely opposed directions. But, in the last analysis, this means that the daily practical activity of Social Democracy loses all connection with socialism. The great socialist significance of the trade-union and parliamentary struggles is that through them the *awareness*, the consciousness, of the proletariat becomes socialist, and it is organized as a class. But if they are considered as instruments for the direct socialization of the capitalist economy, they lose not only their supposed effectiveness, but also cease to be a means of preparing the working class for the proletarian conquest of power.

Eduard Bernstein and Konrad Schmidt⁹ suffer from a complete misunderstanding when they console themselves with the belief that even though the program of the Party is reduced to work for social reforms and ordinary trade-union work, the final objective of the labor movement is not therefore lost, because each forward step reaches beyond the given immediate aim, and the socialist goal is implied as a tendency in the movement. This is certainly fully true of the present tactic of German Social Democracy in which a firm and conscious effort toward the conquest of political power precedes the trade-union struggle and the work for social reforms. But if this presupposed effort is separated from the movement, and social reforms are then made an end in themselves, such activity not only does not lead to the realization of socialism as the ultimate goal, but moves in precisely the opposite direction.

Konrad Schmidt simply falls back on a so to speak mechanical movement which, once started, cannot stop by itself. He justifies this with the saying "One's appetite grows with eating," and the working class will not content itself with reforms as long as the final socialist transformation is not realized. The last presupposition is quite true, as the insufficiency of capitalist social reforms themselves shows. But the conclusion drawn from it could only be true if it were possible to construct an unbroken chain of continually growing reforms leading from the present social order to socialism. This is, however, a fantasy. In accordance with the nature of things, the chain breaks quickly, and the paths that the movement can take from that point are many and varied.

The most probable immediate result of this is, then, a tactical shift toward using all means to make possible the practical results, the social reforms. As

soon as immediate practical results become the principal aim, the clear-cut, irreconcilable class standpoint, which has meaning only insofar as it proposes to take power, will be found more and more an obstacle. The direct consequence of this will be the adoption by the Party of a "policy of compensation," a policy of horse-trading, and an attitude of sage diplomatic conciliation.¹⁰ But the movement cannot remain immobile for long. Since social reforms in the capitalist world are and remain an empty promise no matter what tactics one uses, the next logical step is necessarily disillusionment in social reform. One ends up in the calm harbor where Professor Schmoller and Co.¹¹ have dropped anchor after having navigated the waters of social reform, finally letting the course of things proceed as God wills.¹²

It is not true that socialism will arise automatically and under all circumstances from the daily struggle of the working class. Socialism will be the consequence only of the ever growing contradictions of capitalist economy and the comprehension by the working class of the unavoidability of the suppression of these contradictions through a social transformation. When the first condition is denied and the second rejected, as is the case with revisionism, the labor movement is reduced to a simple cooperative and reformist movement, and moves in a straight line toward the total abandonment of the class standpoint.

These consequences also become clear when we regard revisionism from another side, and ask what is the general character of revisionism. It is obvious that revisionism does not defend capitalist relations. It does not join the bourgeois economists in denying the existence of the contradictions of capitalism. Rather, its theory is based on the presupposition of the existence of these contradictions, just like the Marxist conception. But, on the other hand, what constitutes precisely the essential kernel of revisionism and distinguishes it fundamentally from the attitude taken by Social Democracy up to now is that it does not base its theory on the suppression of these contradictions as a result of their logical internal development.

The theory of revisionism occupies an intermediate place between two extremes. Revisionism does not want to see the contradictions of capitalism mature, to *suppress* these contradictions through a revolutionary transformation. Rather, it wants to lessen, to *attenuate* the capitalist contradictions. Thus, the antagonism between production and exchange is to be attenuated by the cessation of crises and the formation of capitalist employers' organizations; the antagonism between capital and labor is to be adjusted by bettering the situation of the workers and by conserving the middle classes; and the

contradiction between the class state and society is to be lessened through increased control and democracy.

Of course, the present tactic of Social Democracy does not consist in *waiting* for the antagonisms of capitalism to develop to their most extreme point and only then transforming them. On the contrary, the essence of revolutionary tactics is to recognize the *direction* of this development and then, in the political struggle, to push its consequences to the extreme. Thus, Social Democracy has combatted protectionism and militarism without waiting for their reactionary character to become fully evident. Bernstein's tactics, however, are not guided by a consideration of the development and the aggravation of the contradictions of capitalism but by the prospect of the attenuation of these contradictions. He shows this most clearly when he speaks of the "adaptation" of capitalist economy. Now, when could such a conception be correct? All the contradictions of modern society are simply the results of the capitalist process of production. If it is true that capitalism will continue to develop in the direction it has taken until the present, then the unavoidable consequence is that its contradictions must necessarily become sharper and more aggravated instead of lessening. The possibility of the attenuation of the contradictions of capitalism presupposes that the capitalist mode of production itself will stop its progress. In short, the general presupposition of Bernstein's theory is the *cessation of capitalist development*. In this way, however, his theory condemns itself in a twofold manner. In the first place, it manifests its *utopian* character in its stand on the establishment of socialism. It is *a priori* clear that a defective capitalist development cannot lead to a socialist transformation. This proves the correctness of our presentation of the practical consequences of the theory. In the second place, Bernstein's theory reveals its *reactionary* character when it is related to the actual rapid capitalist development. This poses the question: given the real development of capitalism, how can we explain or rather characterize Bernstein's position?

In the first chapter, we demonstrated the untenability of the economic preconditions on which Bernstein builds his analysis of existing social relationships (his theory of the "means of adaptation"). We have seen that neither the credit system nor cartels can be said to be "means of adaptation" of the capitalist economy. Neither the temporary cessation of crises nor the survival of the middle class can be regarded as symptoms of capitalist adaptation. But, aside from their incorrectness, there is a common characteristic in all of the above details of the theory of the means of adaptation. This theory does not seize these manifestations of contemporary economic life as they

appear in their organic relationship with the whole of capitalist development, with the complete economic mechanism of capitalism. The theory pulls these details out of their living economic context, treating them as the *disiecta membra* of a lifeless machine. Consider, for example, the conception of the adaptive effect of *credit*. If we consider credit as a higher natural stage of the process of exchange and, therefore, as tied to all the contradictions inherent in capitalist exchange, we cannot possibly see it, at the same time, as a mechanical means of adaptation existing outside of the process of exchange any more than we could consider money, commodities, or capital as "means of adaptation" of capitalism. But, no less than money, commodities, and capital, credit is an organic link of capitalist economy at a certain stage of its development. Like them, it is an indispensable gear in the mechanism of the capitalist economy and, at the same time, an instrument of destruction, since it aggravates the internal contradictions of capitalism. The same thing is true of cartels and the perfected means of communication.

The same mechanical and undialectical conception is seen in the way that Bernstein describes the cessation of crises as a symptom of the "adaptation" of the capitalist economy. For him, crises are simply derangements of the economic mechanism. With their cessation, he thinks, the mechanism could function smoothly. But the fact is that crises are not "derangements"—or, rather, they are "derangements" without which the capitalist economy as a whole could not develop at all. If, in a word, crises constitute the only method possible in capitalism—and therefore the normal method—of periodically solving the conflict between the unlimited extension of production and the narrow limits of the market, then crises are an organic phenomenon, inseparable from the capitalist economy.

In an "undisturbed" advance of capitalist production lurks a threat to capitalism that is much greater than crises. It is not the threat resulting from the contradiction between production and exchange, but from the growth of the productivity of labor itself, which leads to a constantly falling rate of profit. The fall in the rate of profit has the extremely dangerous tendency of rendering impossible the production of small and middle-size capitals, and thus limiting the new formation and therefore the extension of placements for capital. It is precisely crises which constitute the other consequence of the same process. The result of crises is the periodic *depreciation* of capital, a fall in the prices of the means of production, a paralysis of a part of the active capital, and, in time, the increase of profits. Crises thus create the possibilities of new investment and therefore of the advance of production. Hence,

they appear to be the instrument for rekindling the fire of capitalist development. Their cessation—not temporary cessation but their total disappearance—would not lead to the further development of the capitalist economy, as Bernstein thinks. Rather, it would drive capitalism into the swamps.

True to the mechanical view of his theory of adaptation, Bernstein forgets the necessity of crises as well as the necessity of new placements of small and middle-size capitals. And that is why, among other things, the constant reappearance of small capital seems to him to be a sign of the cessation of capitalist development though it is, in fact, a sign of normal capitalist development.

There is, of course, one viewpoint from which all of the above-mentioned phenomena are seen exactly as they have been presented by the theory of "adaptation." It is the viewpoint of the *individual* capitalist who reflects in his mind the economic facts around him just as they appear when deformed by the laws of competition. The individual capitalist sees each organic part of the totality of our economy as a whole, an independent entity. Further, he sees them as they act on him, the individual capitalist; and he therefore considers these facts to be simple "derangements" or simple "means of adaptation." For the individual capitalist, crises are really simple "derangements" or "means of adaptation"; the cessation of crises accords him a longer existence. As far as he is concerned, credit is only a means of "adapting" his insufficient productive forces to the needs of the market. And it seems to him that the cartel of which he becomes a member really suppresses industrial anarchy.

In a word, Bernstein's theory of adaptation is nothing but a theoretical generalization of the conception of the individual capitalist. What is this viewpoint theoretically if not the essential and characteristic aspect of bourgeois vulgar economics? All the economic errors of this school rest precisely on the conception that mistakes the phenomena of competition, as seen from the angle of the individual capitalist, for the phenomena of the whole of capitalist economy. Just as Bernstein considers credit to be a means of "adaptation," so vulgar economy considers *money* to be a judicious means of "adaptation" to the needs of exchange. Vulgar economy, too, tries to find the antidote against the ills of capitalism in the phenomena of capitalism itself. Like Bernstein, it believes in the *possibility* of regulating the capitalist economy. And, still in the manner of Bernstein, it arrives in time at the desire to *palliate* the contradictions of capitalism, that is, at the belief in the possibility of patching up the sores of capitalism. In other words, it ends up with a reactionary and not a revolutionary program, and thus in a utopia.

The revisionist theory can therefore be characterized in the following way: it is a theory of socialist standstill justified through a vulgar economic theory of capitalist standstill.

PART TWO: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIALISM¹³

The greatest conquest in the development of the proletarian class struggle was the discovery that the point of departure for the realization of socialism lies in the *economic relations* of capitalist society. As a result, socialism was changed from an "ideal" dreamed by humanity for thousands of years to an *historical necessity*.

Bernstein denies the existence of these economic presuppositions of socialism in the society of today. In this, his reasoning has undergone an interesting evolution. At first, in the *Neue Zeit*, he only contested the rapidity of the process of concentration taking place in industry, basing his position on a comparison of the occupational statistics of Germany in 1882 and 1895. In order to use these figures for his purpose, he was obliged to have recourse to an entirely summary and mechanical procedure. But even in the most favorable case, his reference to the persistence of middle-size enterprises could not in the least weaken the Marxian analysis, because the latter does not presuppose, as a condition for the realization of socialism, either a definite *rate* of concentration of industry—that is, a definite *delay* of the realization of the socialist goal—or, as we have already shown, the *absolute disappearance* of small capitals, or the disappearance of the petty bourgeoisie.

In the further development of his ideas in his book, Bernstein furnishes us new proofs: *the statistics of shareholding societies*. These statistics are supposed to prove that the number of shareholders increases constantly and, as a result, the capitalist class does not become smaller but grows continually larger. It is surprising that Bernstein has so little acquaintance with his material, and how poorly he knows how to use the data in his own behalf.

If he wanted to disprove the Marxian law of industrial development by referring to the condition of shareholding societies, he should have resorted to entirely different figures. Namely, anybody who is acquainted with the history of shareholding societies in Germany knows that their average foundation capital has *diminished* almost constantly. Thus, while before 1871 the average foundation capital reached the figure of 10.8 million marks, it was only 4.01 million in 1871, 3.8 million in 1873, less than a million from 1882 to 1887, 0.56 million in 1891, and only 0.62 million in 1892. After this date, the

figures oscillated around 1 million marks, falling from 1.78 million in 1895 to 1.19 million in the course of the first half of 1897.¹⁴

Surprising figures! Bernstein probably hoped to use them to construct the existence of an anti-Marxian tendency, that of the transition of large enterprises back into small ones. But, in this case, everyone can answer him: If you are to prove anything by means of these statistics, you must first of all show that they refer to the same branches of industry, that the small enterprises really replace large ones, and that they do not appear only where, previously, individual enterprises, artisan industry, or miniature industry were the rule. This, however, you cannot show. The passage of immense shareholding societies to middle-size and small enterprises can only be explained by the fact that the system of shareholding companies continues to penetrate new branches of production. Before, only a small number of large enterprises were organized as shareholding societies. Gradually shareholding organization has won middle-size and even small enterprises. (Today we can observe shareholding societies with a capital of less than 1,000 marks.)

But what is the economic significance of the ever greater extension of the system of shareholding societies? It signifies the growing socialization of production within the capitalist form—socialization not only of large but also of middle-size and even small production. Therefore, the extension of shareholding does not contradict Marxist theory but, on the contrary, confirms it emphatically.

In effect, what does the economic phenomenon of a shareholding society actually amount to? On the one hand, the unification of a number of small fortunes into one large productive capital; on the other hand, the separation of production from capitalist ownership. That is, it signifies a double victory over the capitalist mode of production—but still on the capitalist base. In view of this, what is the meaning of the statistics cited by Bernstein concerning the large number of shareholders participating in capitalist enterprises? These statistics demonstrate precisely that at present one capitalist enterprise does not correspond, as hitherto, to a single proprietor of capital but to a whole group, an ever increasing number of capitalists. Consequently, the economic concept "capitalist" no longer signifies an isolated individual. The industrial capitalist of today is a collective person, composed of hundreds and even of thousands of individuals. Within the framework of capitalist society, the category "capitalist" has itself become a social category; it has been *socialized*.

How can Bernstein's belief that the phenomenon of shareholding societies stands for the dispersion and not the concentration of capital be

explained in view of the above? Why goes he see the extension of capitalist property where Marx sees the "suppression of capitalist property"? This is a simple, vulgar economic error. By "capitalist" Bernstein does not mean a category of production but of property rights; not an economic unit but a fiscal unit; not a totality of production but simply a certain quantity of money. That is why in his English thread trust he does not see the fusion of 12,300 persons into one, but fully 12,300 different capitalists. That is why the engineer Schulze, whose wife's dowry brought him "a large number of shares" from stockholder Müller, is also a capitalist for Bernstein (p. 53). That is why, for Bernstein, the whole world seems to swarm with capitalists.¹⁵

Here as usual, the theoretical base of Bernstein's vulgar economic error is his "popularization" of socialism. By transporting the concept "capitalist" from the relations of production to property relations, and by speaking of "men instead of speaking of entrepreneurs" (p. 52), he moves the question of socialism from the realm of production into the realm of relations of fortune—from the relation between capital and labor to the relation between rich and poor.

In this manner, we are merrily led from Marx and Engels to the author of the *Evangel of the Poor Fisherman*, only with the difference that Weitling,¹⁶ with the sure instinct of the proletarian, recognized in the opposition between the poor and the rich the class antagonisms in their primitive form, and wanted to make of them a lever of the socialist movement, while Bernstein, on the other hand, sees the prospects of socialism in making the poor rich, that is, in the attenuation of class antagonisms. For this reason, Bernstein is engaged in a petty-bourgeois course.

True, Bernstein does not limit himself to income statistics. He furnishes statistics of economic enterprises, and from many countries: Germany, France, England, Switzerland, Austria, and the United States. But what kind of statistics are these? They are not the comparative figures of *different periods* in each country but of each period in different countries. Thus, with the exception of Germany, where he reprints the old contrast between 1895 and 1882, he does not compare the statistics of enterprises of a given country at different epochs but only the *absolute* figures for different countries: England in 1891, France in 1894, the United States in 1890, etc. He reaches the following conclusion: "If large exploitation is already supreme in industry today, it nevertheless represents, including the enterprises dependent on it, even in a country as developed as Prussia, at most *half* of the population occupied in production" (p. 98). This is also true of Germany, England, Belgium, etc.

What he proves in this way is obviously not the existence of this or that tendency of economic development but merely the absolute relation of forces of different forms of enterprise or of the various professional classes. If this is supposed to prove the impossibility of realizing socialism, the reasoning must rest on the theory according to which the result of social efforts is decided by the relation of the numerical physical forces of the elements in the struggle—that is, by the mere factor of *violence*. Here Bernstein, who always thunders against Blanquism, himself falls into the grossest Blanquist misunderstanding. There is, of course, the difference that the Blanquists as a socialist and revolutionary tendency presupposed as obvious the possibility of the economic realization of socialism and built the chances of a violent revolution—even by a small minority—on this possibility. Bernstein, on the contrary, infers from the numerical insufficiency of a majority of the people the impossibility of the economic realization of socialism. Social Democracy does not, however, expect to attain its aim either as a result of the victorious violence of a minority or through the numerical superiority of a majority. It sees socialism as a result of economic necessity—and the comprehension of that necessity—leading to the suppression of capitalism by the masses of the people. This necessity manifests itself above all in the *anarchy of capitalism*.

Concerning the decisive question of anarchy in capitalist economy, Bernstein denies only the great general crises, not the partial and national crises. Thus, he denies that there is a great deal of anarchy; at the same time, he admits the existence of a little anarchy. Concerning the capitalist economy, he is—to use Marx's illustration—like the foolish virgin who had a child "who was only very small." But the misfortune is that in matters like anarchy, little and much are equally bad. If Bernstein recognizes the existence of a little anarchy, then by the mechanism of commodity economy, this anarchy will be extended to unheard-of proportions—to the breakdown. But if Bernstein hopes, while maintaining the system of commodity production, to gradually transform the bit of anarchy into order and harmony, he again falls into one of the fundamental errors of bourgeois vulgar economics in that he treats the mode of exchange as independent of the mode of production.¹⁷

This is not the correct place for a detailed demonstration of Bernstein's surprising confusion concerning the most elementary principles of political economy. But one point, to which we are led by the fundamental question of capitalist anarchy, must be briefly clarified.

Bernstein declares that Marx's labor theory of value is a mere abstraction, a term which for him, in political economy, obviously constitutes an insult.

But if the labor theory of value is only an abstraction, if it is only a "mental construct" (p. 38)—then every normal citizen who has done military duty and pays his taxes has the same right as Karl Marx to fashion his favorite nonsense into such a "mental construct," to make his own law of value. "Marx has just as much right to neglect the properties of commodities until the latter are no more than the incarnation of quantities of simple human labor as have the economists of the Böhm-Jevons school to abstract all the qualities of commodities other than their utility" (p. 34).¹⁸

Thus, Marx's social labor and Menger's abstract utility are, for Bernstein, quite similar—pure abstractions. In this, Bernstein forgets completely that Marx's abstraction is not an invention but a discovery. It does not exist in Marx's head but in the commodity economy. It has not an imaginary but a real social existence, so real that it can be cut, hammered, weighed, and coined. The abstract human labor discovered by Marx is, in its developed form, none other than money. That is precisely one of Marx's most brilliant discoveries, while for all bourgeois political economists, from the first of the mercantilists to the last of the classicists, the essence of money has remained a book with seven seals.

The Böhm-Jevons abstract utility is, on the contrary, a mere mental construct or, rather, it is a construct of intellectual emptiness, a private absurdity for which neither capitalism nor any other society can be made responsible but only vulgar bourgeois economics itself. With this "mental construct," Bernstein, Böhm, and Jevons, and the entire subjective fraternity, can remain twenty more years before the mystery of money without arriving at a solution any different from the one reached by any cobbler—namely, that money is also a "useful" thing.

Thus, Bernstein has fully lost all comprehension of Marx's law of value. However, anybody with a small understanding of Marxian economics can see that without the law of value, Marx's whole system is incomprehensible. Or, to speak more concretely, without an understanding of the nature of the commodity and its exchange, the entire economy of capitalism, with all its concatenations, must remain an enigma.

But, what precisely is the magic key which enabled Marx to open the door to the deepest secrets of all capitalist phenomena and solve, as if at play, problems that were not even suspected by the greatest minds of classical bourgeois political economy, such as Smith and Ricardo? Nothing other than his conception of the whole capitalist economy as an historical phenomenon—not merely, as in the best of cases with the classical economists, concerning

the feudal past of capitalism, but also concerning the socialist future. The secret of Marx's theory of value, of his analysis of money, his theory of capital, his theory of the rate of profit, and consequently of the whole existing economic system is—the transitory nature of the capitalist economy, its collapse: thus—and this is only another aspect of the same phenomenon—the final goal, socialism. And precisely because, *a priori*, Marx looked at capitalism from the socialist's viewpoint, that is, from the historical viewpoint, he was enabled to decipher the hieroglyphics of capitalist economy. And because he took the socialist viewpoint as a point of departure for his analyses of bourgeois society, he was in a position to give a scientific base to socialism.

This is the measure by which we evaluate Bernstein's remarks at the end of his book where he complains of the "dualism" found "everywhere in Marx's monumental work" [*Capital*—D.H.]. "The dualism is found in that the work wishes to be a scientific study and prove, at the same time, a thesis which was completely elaborated a long time before; it is based on a schema that already contains the result to which he wants to lead. The return to the *Communist Manifesto* (that is, to the socialist goal!—R.L.) proves the existence of vestiges of utopianism in Marx's system" (p. 210).

Marx's "dualism," however, is nothing but the dualism of the socialist future and the capitalist present, of capital and labor, of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. It is the monumental scientific reflection of the dualism existing in bourgeois society, the dualism of the bourgeois class antagonisms.

When Bernstein sees this theoretical dualism in Marx as "a survival of utopianism," this is only his naïve avowal that he denies the historical dualism of bourgeois society, the existence of class antagonisms in capitalism, that for him socialism itself has become only a "survival of utopianism." Bernstein's "monism"—that is, his unity—is but the unity of the eternalized capitalist order, the unity of the socialist who has renounced his aim and has decided to see in bourgeois society, one and immutable, the goal of human development.

However, if Bernstein does not see in the economic structure of capitalism the duality, the development that leads to socialism, then in order to preserve the socialist program, at least in form, he is obliged to take refuge in an idealist construction lying outside of the economic development. He is obliged to transform socialism itself from a definite historical phase of social development into an abstract "principle." That is why the "cooperative principle"—the meager decantation of socialism with which Bernstein wishes to garnish the capitalist economy—appears not as a concession of his bourgeois theory to the socialist future of society but to Bernstein's own socialist past.

TRADE UNIONS, COOPERATIVES, AND POLITICAL DEMOCRACY

...According to Bernstein, democracy is an inevitable stage in the development of modern society. To him, as to the bourgeois theoreticians of liberalism, democracy is the great fundamental law of historical development in general whose realization must be served by all of the active forces of political life. However, presented in such absolute form, this is totally false; it is a petty-bourgeois and superficial schematization of the results of a very short peak of bourgeois development, roughly the last twenty-five or thirty years. We reach entirely different conclusions when we examine more closely the historical development of democracy and at the same time the general political history of capitalism.

Concerning the former, democracy has been found in the most dissimilar social formations: in primitive communist societies, in the slave states of antiquity, and in the medieval city-communes. Similarly, absolutism and constitutional monarchy are found in the most varied economic contexts. On the other hand, at its beginnings—as commodity production—capitalism calls into being a democratic constitution in the city-communes of the Middle Ages. Later, in its more developed form, as manufacturing, capitalism found its corresponding political form in the absolute monarchy. Finally, as a developed industrial economy, it brought into being in France alternatively the democratic Republic (1793), the absolute monarchy of Napoleon I, the nobles' monarchy of the Restoration Period (1815–1830), the bourgeois constitutional monarchy of Louis-Philippe, then again the democratic Republic, and again the monarchy of Napoleon III, and finally, for the third time, the Republic. In Germany, the only truly democratic institution—universal suffrage—is not a conquest of bourgeois liberalism. Universal suffrage in Germany was an instrument for the fusion of the small states, and it is only in this sense that it has any importance for the development of the German bourgeoisie, which otherwise is quite satisfied with a semi-feudal constitutional monarchy. In Russia, capitalism prospered for a long time under the regime of Oriental personal rule without the bourgeoisie manifesting the least desire for democracy. In Austria, universal suffrage was above all a life line thrown to a decomposing monarchy [and how little it is actually tied together with true democracy is shown by the domination of Paragraph 14].¹⁹ Finally, in Belgium, the conquest of universal suffrage by the labor movement was undoubtedly due to the weakness of militarism, consequently to the particular geographic and political situation of the country; and, above all, it is a “bit of democracy” that has been won not *by* the bourgeoisie but *against* it.

On closer examination, the uninterrupted ascent of democracy, which to our revisionism, as well as to bourgeois liberalism, appears as a great fundamental law of human history and, at the very least, of modern history, is shown to be a phantom. No absolute and universal relation can be constructed between capitalist development and democracy. The political form is always the result of the whole sum of political factors, domestic as well as foreign. Within its boundaries it admits all variations of the scale, from absolute monarchy to the democratic republic.

We must therefore abandon all hope of establishing a general law of the historical development of democracy even within the framework of modern society. Turning to the present phase of bourgeois history, we also see here factors in the political situation which, instead of assuring the realization of Bernstein's schema, lead rather to the abandonment by bourgeois society of the democratic conquests won up to the present.

On the one hand—and this is of the greatest importance—the democratic institutions have largely played out their role as aids in the bourgeois development. Insofar as they were necessary to bring about the fusion of small states and the creation of large modern states (Germany, Italy), they have become dispensable. Economic development has meanwhile effected an internal organic healing [and the surgical dressing, political democracy, can thus be taken off without any danger for the organism of bourgeois society!]

The same thing is true of the transformation of the entire political and administrative machinery of the state from a feudal or semi-feudal mechanism to a capitalist one. While this transformation has been historically inseparable from the development of democracy, today it has been achieved to such an extent that the purely democratic ingredients of society, such as universal suffrage and the republican form of the state, may be eliminated without the administration, the state finances, or the military organization, etc., finding it necessary to return to the pre-March forms.²⁰

If liberalism as such is now essentially useless to bourgeois society, on the other hand, in important respects it has become a direct impediment. Two factors completely dominate the political life of contemporary states: *world politics* and the labor movement. Each is only a different aspect of the present phase of capitalist development.

As a result of the development of the world economy and the aggravation and generalization of competition on the world market, militarism and marinism²¹ as instruments of world politics have become a decisive factor in the internal as well as in the external life of the great states. If it is true that

world politics and militarism represent a *rising* tendency in the present phase, then bourgeois democracy must logically move in a *descending* line. [The most striking example: the North American union since the Spanish war. In France, the Republic owes its existence mainly to the international situation which provisionally makes a war impossible. If a war did come and, as everything leads one to believe, France were not up to the test, then the answer to the first French defeat would be—the proclamation of the monarchy in Paris. In Germany, the new era of great armaments (1893) and that of world politics which began with Kiao-Cheou²² were paid for with two sacrifices of bourgeois democracy: the decomposition of the liberals and the change of the Center Party.]²³

If foreign policy pushes the bourgeoisie into the arms of reaction, this is no less true of domestic politics—thanks to the rise of the working class. Bernstein shows that he recognizes this when he makes the “legend” of Social Democracy which “wants to swallow everything”—in other words, the socialist efforts of the working class—responsible for the desertion of the liberal bourgeoisie [from a possible alliance with Social Democracy—D.H.]. In this connection, he advises the proletariat to disavow its socialist aim so that the mortally frightened liberals might come out of the mousehole of reaction. In thus making the abandonment of the socialist labor movement an essential condition and a social presupposition for the preservation of bourgeois democracy today, he proves in a striking manner that this democracy is in complete contradiction with the inner tendency of development of modern society. At the same time, he proves that the socialist labor movement itself is a *direct product* of this tendency.

In this way, however, he proves still another thing. By making the renunciation of the socialist goal an essential presupposition and condition of the resurrection of bourgeois democracy, he shows, conversely, how inexact is the claim that bourgeois democracy is an indispensable condition of the socialist movement and the victory of socialism. Bernstein’s reasoning exhausts itself in a vicious circle; his conclusion swallows his premises.

The exit from this circle is quite simple. In view of the fact that bourgeois liberalism has sold its soul from fear of the growing labor movement and its final aim, it follows that the socialist labor movement today is and can be the *only* support of democracy. The fate of the socialist movement is not bound to bourgeois democracy; but the fate of democracy, on the contrary, is bound to the socialist movement. Democracy does not acquire greater chances of life in the measure that the working class renounces the struggle for its emancipation;

on the contrary, democracy acquires greater chances of survival as the socialist movement becomes sufficiently strong to struggle against the reactionary consequences of world politics and the bourgeois desertion of democracy. He who would strengthen democracy must also want to strengthen and not weaken the socialist movement; and with the renunciation of the struggle for socialism goes that of both the labor movement and democracy.

[At the end of his “Answer” to Kautsky²⁴ in *Vorwärts* (March 26, 1899), Bernstein explains that he is completely in agreement with the practical part of the Social Democratic program; his objections were only to the theoretical parts of that program. Aside from that, he obviously believes that he can march with full rights in the ranks of the Party, for how “important” is it “if there is a proposition in the theoretical part which no longer agrees with one’s conception of the course of development”? This explanation shows best of all how completely Bernstein has lost the sense of the connection of the practical activity of Social Democracy with its general principles, how much the same words have ceased to mean the same thing for Bernstein and the Party. In effect, Bernstein’s own theory, as we have seen, leads to the most elementary Social Democratic understanding—that without the fundamental basis, the practical struggle too is worthless and aimless, that with the giving up of the *ultimate goal*, the *movement* itself must be lost.]

THE CONQUEST OF POLITICAL POWER

As we have seen, the fate of democracy is bound up with the fate of the labor movement. But does the development of democracy, in the best of cases, render superfluous or impossible a proletarian revolution in the sense of the seizure of state power, the conquest of political power?

Bernstein settles the question by minutely weighing the good and bad sides of legal reform and revolution in almost the same manner in which cinnamon or pepper is weighed out in a consumers’ cooperative store. He sees the legal course of development as the action of the intellect, while the revolutionary course is the action of feeling. Reformist work is seen as a slow method of historical progress; revolution as a rapid method. In legislation, he sees a methodical force; in revolution, an elemental force (p. 218).

We have known for a long time that the petty-bourgeois reformer finds “good” and “bad” sides in everything; he nibbles a bit at all grasses.²⁵ But we have known for just as long that the real course of events is little affected by such petty-bourgeois combinations, and that the carefully gathered little pile

of the "good sides" of all things possible blows away at the first wind of history. Historically, legislative reform and the revolutionary method function in accordance with influences that are more profound than the consideration of the advantages or inconveniences of this or that method.

In the history of bourgeois society, legislative reform served generally to strengthen the rising class until the latter felt sufficiently strong to seize political power, to overturn the existing juridical system and to construct a new one. Bernstein, thundering against the conquest of political power as a Blanquist theory of violence, has the misfortune to label as a Blanquist error that which has been for centuries the pivot and motive force of human history. As long as class societies have existed, and the class struggle has constituted the essential content of their history, the conquest of political power has continually been the aim of all rising classes and the beginning and end of every historical period. This can be seen in the long struggle of the peasantry against the financiers and nobility in ancient Rome; in the struggles of the medieval nobility against the bishops, and the artisans against the nobles in the cities of the Middle Ages; and in modern times, in the struggle of the bourgeoisie against feudalism.

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 as, e.g., the north and south poles, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

In effect, every legal constitution is the *product* of a revolution. In the history of classes, revolution is the act of political creation while legislation is the political expression of the life of a society that has already come into being. Work for legal reforms does not itself contain its own driving force independent from revolution. During every historical period, work for reforms is carried on only in the direction given it by the impetus of the last revolution, and continues as long as that impulsion continues to make itself felt. Or, to put it more concretely, it is carried on only in the *framework* of the social form created by the last revolution. Precisely here is the kernel of the problem.

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. A social transformation and a legislative reform do not differ according to their *duration* but according to their *essence*. The whole secret of historical transformations through the utilization of political power consists precisely in the change of simple quantitative modification into a new quality, or to speak

more concretely, in the transition from one historical period, one social order, to another.

He who pronounces himself in favor of the method of legal reforms *in place of and as opposed to* the conquest of political power and social revolution does not really choose a more tranquil, surer and slower road to the *same* goal. He chooses a *different* goal. Instead of taking a stand for the establishment of a new social order, he takes a stand for surface modifications of the old order. Thus, the political views of revisionism lead to the same conclusion as the economic theories of revisionism: not to the realization of the *socialist* order, but to the reform of *capitalism*, not to the suppression of the wage system, but to the diminution of exploitation; in a word, to the elimination of the abuses of capitalism instead of to that of capitalism itself. . . .

In a word, democracy is indispensable not because it renders *superfluous* the conquest of political power by the proletariat but, on the contrary, because it renders this conquest of power both *necessary* as well as *possible*. When Engels, in his Preface to *Class Struggles in France*, revised the tactics of the modern labor movement and opposed the legal struggle to the barricades, he did not have in mind—*this comes out in every line of the Preface*—the question of the final conquest of political power, but the modern daily struggle; not the attitude of the proletariat *opposed to* the capitalist state at the moment of the seizure of state power, but its attitude within the *bounds* of the capitalist state. In a word, Engels gave directions to the *oppressed* proletariat, not to the victorious proletariat.²⁶

On the other hand, Marx's well-known declaration concerning the agrarian question in England, on which Bernstein leans heavily—"We would probably succeed more easily by buying out the landlords"—does not refer to the attitude of the proletariat *before* but *after* its victory. For, obviously, it can only be a question of buying out the old dominant class when the working class is in power. The possibility envisaged by Marx is that of the *peaceful exercise of the dictatorship of the proletariat* and not the replacement of the dictatorship by capitalist social reforms.

The necessity of the proletariat's seizing power was always unquestionable for Marx and Engels. It is left to Bernstein to consider the henhouse of bourgeois parliamentarism as the correct organ by means of which the most formidable social transformation in history, the passage of society from the *capitalist* to the *socialist* form, is to be completed.

Bernstein, however, introduces his theory with fear and warnings against the danger of the proletariat's acquiring power too *early*! That is, according

to Bernstein, the proletariat ought to leave bourgeois society in its present conditions and itself suffer a frightful defeat. What follows clearly from this fear is that if circumstances led the proletariat to power, it could draw from Bernstein's theory the following "practical" conclusion: to go to sleep.²⁷ In this way, the theory judges itself, it is a conception which, at the most decisive moments of the struggle, condemns the proletariat to inactivity, and thus to a passive betrayal of its own cause.

In effect, our program would be a miserable scrap of paper if it could not serve us in *all* eventualities, at *all* moments of the struggle, and serve precisely by its *application* and not by its nonapplication. If our program is the formulation of the historical development of society from capitalism to socialism, obviously it must also formulate, in all their fundamental lines, all the transitory phases of this development, and consequently at every moment it should be able to indicate to the proletariat what ought to be its correct behavior in order to move toward socialism. It follows generally that there can be *no time* when the proletariat will be obliged to abandon its program, or be abandoned by it.

This is manifested practically in the fact that there can be no time when the proletariat, brought to power by the force of circumstances, is not in the condition, or is not morally obliged, to take certain measures for the realization of its program, transitory measures in the direction of socialism. Behind the belief that the socialist program could break down at any moment during the political domination of the proletariat, and give no directions for its realization, lies, unconsciously, the other belief, that *the socialist program is generally and at all times, unrealizable.*

And what if the transitory measures are premature? The question hides a whole slew of misunderstandings concerning the real course of social transformations.

Above all, the seizure of state power by the proletariat, i.e., by a large popular class, is not produced artificially. It presupposes (with the exception of cases like the Paris Commune when power was not attained after a conscious struggle for its goal, but, exceptionally, fell into the proletariat's hands like an object abandoned by everybody else) a definite degree of maturity of economic and political relations. Here we have the essential difference between Blanquist²⁸ coups d'état by a "resolute minority," bursting out at any moment like a pistol shot, and for this very reason, always inopportune, and the conquest of political power by a large and class-conscious popular mass. Such a mass itself can only be the product of the beginning of the collapse of

bourgeois society, and therefore bears in itself the economic and political legitimation of its opportune appearance.

If, therefore, from the standpoint of the social *presuppositions*, the conquest of political power by the working class cannot occur "too early," then from the standpoint of political effect—of *conservation* of power—it is necessarily "too early." The premature revolution, the thought of which keeps Bernstein awake, menaces us like a sword of Damocles. Against it neither prayers nor supplication, scares nor anguish, are of avail. And this, for two very simple reasons.

In the first place, it is impossible to imagine that a transformation as formidable as the passage from capitalist society to socialist society can be realized in one act, by a victorious blow of the proletariat. To consider that as possible is again to lend credence to pure Blanquist conceptions. The socialist transformation presupposes a long and stubborn struggle in the course of which, quite probably, the proletariat will be repulsed more than once, so that, from the viewpoint of the final outcome of the struggle, it will have necessarily come to power "too early" the first time.

In the second place, however, it will also be impossible to avoid the "premature" seizure of state power precisely because these "premature" attacks of the proletariat constitute a factor, and indeed a very important factor, creating the *political* conditions of the final victory. In the course of the political crisis accompanying its seizure of power, in the fire of long and stubborn struggles, the proletariat will acquire the degree of political maturity permitting it to obtain the definitive victory of the revolution. Thus these "premature" attacks of the proletariat on the state power are in themselves important historical moments helping to provoke and determine the *point* of the final victory. Considered from *this* point of view, the idea of a "premature" conquest of political power by the laboring class appears to be a political absurdity, derived from a mechanical conception of social development, and positing for the victory of the class struggle a *time* fixed *outside* and *independent* of the class struggle.

Since the proletariat is not in the position to seize political power in any other way than "prematurely"; since the proletariat is absolutely obliged to seize power "too early" once or several times before it can enduringly maintain itself in power, the objection to the "premature" seizure of power is nothing other than a *general opposition to the aspiration of the proletariat to take state power.*

Just as all roads lead to Rome, so, too, we logically arrive at the conclusion that the revisionist proposal to abandon the ultimate goal of socialism is really

a recommendation to renounce the socialist *movement* itself [that its advice to Social Democracy, "to go to sleep" in the case of the conquest of power, is identical with the advice: *to go to sleep now and forever, i.e., to give up the class struggle*].

THE BREAKDOWN

Bernstein began his revision of Social Democracy by abandoning the theory of capitalist breakdown. The latter, however, is the cornerstone of scientific socialism, and with the removal of this cornerstone, Bernstein must also reject the whole socialist doctrine. In the course of his discussion, he abandons, one after another, the positions of socialism in order to be able to maintain his first affirmation.

Without the breakdown of capitalism, the expropriation of the capitalist class is impossible. Bernstein therefore renounces expropriation and chooses a progressive realization of the "cooperative principle" as the goal of the labor movement.

But cooperation cannot be realized within capitalist production. Bernstein therefore renounces the socialization of production and proposes to reform commerce and to develop consumers' cooperatives.

But the transformation of society through consumers' cooperatives, even together with the trade unions, is incompatible with the real material development of capitalist society. Bernstein therefore abandons the materialist conception of history.

But his conception of the course of economic development is incompatible with the Marxist theory of surplus value. Bernstein therefore abandons the theory of value and of surplus value and, in this way, the whole economic theory of Karl Marx.

But the class struggle of the proletariat cannot be carried on without a definite final aim and without an economic base in the existing society. Bernstein therefore abandons the class struggle and proclaims the reconciliation with bourgeois liberalism.

But in a class society, the class struggle is a fully natural and unavoidable phenomenon. Bernstein therefore contests even the existence of classes in society: for him, the working class is a mass of individuals, divided not only politically and intellectually, but also economically. And, according to him, the bourgeoisie does not group itself politically in accordance with its inner economic interest, but only because of external pressure, from above and below.

But if there is no economic base for the class struggle and if, too, there actually are no classes, then not only the future, but even the past struggles of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie appear impossible, and Social Democracy and its successes seem absolutely incomprehensible. On the other hand, from this point of view, the latter can be understood only as the results of political pressure by the government—that is, not as the natural consequences of historical development but as the fortuitous consequences of the policy of the Hohenzollern; not as the legitimate offspring of capitalist society, but as the bastard children of reaction. Thus, with rigorous logic, Bernstein passes from the materialist conception of history to the outlook of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and the *Vossische Zeitung*.²⁹

After rejecting the whole socialist criticism of capitalist society, the only thing that remains is to find that, on the whole, the present state of affairs is satisfactory. Here too, Bernstein does not hesitate. He finds that at present the reaction is not very strong in Germany, that "we do not see much of political reaction in the countries of Western Europe," and that in nearly all the countries of the West "the attitude of the bourgeois classes toward the socialist movement is at most an attitude of defense but not one of oppression" (*Vörrwärts*, March 26, 1899). Far from becoming worse, the situation of the workers is getting better; the bourgeoisie is politically progressive and even morally healthy; we see little of either reaction or oppression—and it is all for the best in the best of all possible worlds . . .

Bernstein thus travels in a logical sequence from A to Z. He began by abandoning the *final aim* in favor of the movement. But as there can be no socialist movement without the socialist aim, he necessarily ends by renouncing the *movement* itself.

Thus Bernstein's conception of socialism collapses entirely. With him, the proud and admirable symmetric construction of the Marxist system becomes a pile of rubbish in which the debris of all systems, the pieces of thought of various great and small minds, find a common grave. Marx and Proudhon, Leon von Buch and Franz Oppenheimer, Friedrich Albert Lange and Kant, Herr Prokopovich and Dr. Ritter von Neupauer, Herkner and Schulze-Gaevernitz, Lassalle and Professor Julius Wolf: all contribute their bit to Bernstein's system, and he takes a little from each. This is not astonishing. When he abandoned the class standpoint, he lost the political compass, when he abandoned scientific socialism, he lost the axis of intellectual crystallization around which isolated facts group themselves in the organic whole of a coherent conception of the world.

On first consideration, his doctrine, composed of bits of all possible systems, seems to be completely free from prejudices. Bernstein does not like to talk of "party science," or to be more exact, of class science, any more than he likes to talk of class liberalism or class morality. He thinks he succeeds in representing a universal human abstract science, abstract liberalism, abstract morality. But since the actual society is made up of classes which have diametrically opposed interests, aspirations, and conceptions, a universal human science in social questions, an abstract liberalism, an abstract morality, are at present illusions, a self-deception. What Bernstein considers his universal human science, democracy, and morality, is merely the dominant science, dominant democracy, and dominant morality—that is, bourgeois science, bourgeois democracy, bourgeois morality.

In effect, when Bernstein denies the Marxist economic system in order to swear by the teachings of Brentano, Böhm-Jevons, Say, and Julius Wolf, what does he do but exchange the scientific base of the emancipation of the working class for the apologetics of the bourgeoisie? When he speaks of the universal human character of liberalism, and transforms socialism into a variety of liberalism, what does he do but deprive the socialist movement of its class character and, consequently, of its historical content and, consequently, of all content in general, while conversely making the historical bearer of liberalism, the bourgeoisie, the champion of the universal interests of humanity?

And when he condemns the "raising of the material factors to the rank of an all-powerful force of development"; when he protests against the "contempt for the ideal" in Social Democracy; when he presumes to talk for idealism, for morals, but at the same time inveighs against the only source of the moral rebirth of the proletariat, the revolutionary class struggle—what does he actually do but preach to the working class the quintessence of the morality of the bourgeoisie, that is, the reconciliation with the existing order and the transfer of hope to the beyond of an ethical ideal-world.

When he directs his keenest arrows against the dialectic, what does he do but attack the specific mode of thought of the rising class-conscious proletariat. Isn't the dialectic the sword that has helped the proletariat pierce the darkness of its historical future, the intellectual weapon with which the proletariat, though materially still in the yoke, triumphs over the bourgeoisie, proving to the bourgeoisie its transitory character, showing it the inevitability of the proletarian victory? Hasn't the dialectic already realized a revolution in the domain of thought? In that Bernstein takes leave of the dialectic and resorts instead to the intellectual seesaw of the "on the one hand—on the

other hand," "yes—but," "although—however," "more—less," he quite logically lapses into the historically conditioned mode of thought of the declining bourgeoisie, a mode of thought which is the faithful intellectual reflection of its social existence and political activity. The political "on the one hand—on the other hand," "yes—but" of the bourgeoisie of today exactly resembles Bernstein's manner of thinking. This is the sharpest and surest symptom of his bourgeois conception of the world.

But for Bernstein, the word "bourgeois" itself is not a class expression but a universal social notion. Logical to the last dot on the last *i*, he has also exchanged the historical language of the proletariat, together with its science, politics, morals, and mode of thought, for that of the bourgeoisie. When he uses, without distinction, the term "citizen" in reference to the bourgeois as well as to the proletarian, thus intending to refer to man in general, he in fact identifies man in general with the bourgeois, and human society with bourgeois society.

[If at the beginning of the discussion with Bernstein, one still hoped to convince him, to be able to give him back to the movement, by means of arguments from the scientific arsenal of Social Democracy, that hope must now be fully abandoned. Now the same words no longer express the same concepts, and the concepts no longer express the same social facts for both sides. The discussion with Bernstein has become an argument of two world views, of two classes, of two social forms. Today, Bernstein and Social Democracy stand on wholly different terrain.]

OPPORTUNISM IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Bernstein's book is of great historical importance to the German and the international labor movement. This was the first attempt to give a theoretical base to the opportunist currents in Social Democracy.

If we take into consideration sporadic manifestations, such as the question of subsidies for steamships,³⁰ the opportunist currents in our movement have existed for a long time. But it is only since the beginning of the 1890s, with the suppression of the antisocialist laws and the reconquest of the terrain of legality, that we have had an explicit, unitary opportunist current. Vollmar's "state socialism," the vote on the Bavarian budget, the "agrarian socialism" of South Germany, Heine's policy of compensation, Schippel's stand on tariffs and militarism, are the high points in the development of the opportunist practice.³¹

What, above all, is the external characteristic of these practices? Hostility to "theory." This is quite understandable, for our "theory," i.e., the principles of scientific socialism, imposes clearly marked limitations to practical activity—concerning the *aims* of this activity, the *means* of struggle applied, and the *method* of struggle. It is thus natural for those who only run after practical results to want to free their hands, i.e., to split our practice from "theory," to make it independent of theory.

But at every practical effort, this theory hits them on the head. State socialism, agrarian socialism, the policy of compensation, the militia question, all constitute defeats of opportunism. It is clear that if this current is to affirm itself against our principles it must, logically, come to the point of attacking the theory itself, the principles, and rather than ignore them, it must try to shake them and to construct its own theory. Bernstein's book is precisely an effort in that direction. That is why, at the Stuttgart Party Congress [in 1898], the opportunist elements in our Party immediately grouped themselves about Bernstein's banner. If, on the one hand, opportunist currents in practical activity are an entirely natural phenomenon which can be explained in the light of the conditions of our activity and its growth, Bernstein's theory, on the other hand, is a no less natural attempt to group these currents into a general theoretical expression, to discover their proper theoretical presuppositions, and to break with scientific socialism. Bernstein's theory is thus the theoretical ordeal by fire for opportunism, its first scientific legitimization.

How did this test turn out? We have seen the result. Opportunism is not capable of constructing a positive theory capable of withstanding criticism. All it can do is to attack various isolated theses of the Marxist doctrine and, because Marxist doctrine constitutes one solidly constructed edifice, to destroy the entire system from the top to its foundations. This shows that, in its essence, its bases, opportunist practice is irreconcilable with Marxism.

But it is thus further shown that opportunism is incompatible with socialism in general, that its internal tendency is to push the labor movement into bourgeois paths, i.e., to completely paralyze the proletarian class struggle. Considered historically, the proletarian class struggle is obviously not identical with the Marxist system. Before Marx and independent of him, there also existed a labor movement and various socialist systems, each of which, corresponding to the conditions of the time, was in its way the theoretical expression of the working-class struggle for emancipation. The basing of socialism on the moral notion of justice, on a struggle against the mode of distribution instead of against the mode of production; the conception of class antagonism

as an antagonism between the poor and the rich; the effort to graft the "cooperative principle" on capitalist economy—all of what we find in Bernstein's system—already existed before him. And, *in their time*, these theories, in spite of their insufficiency, were actual theories of the proletarian class struggle; they were the children's seven-league boots, thanks to which the proletariat learned to walk upon the scene of history.

But *after* the development of the class struggle itself and its social conditions had led to the abandonment of these theories and to the formulation of the principles of scientific socialism, at least in Germany, there can be no socialism outside of Marxist socialism, and no socialist class struggle outside of Social Democracy. From then on, socialism and Marxism, the proletarian struggle for emancipation and Social Democracy, are identical. Therefore, the return to pre-Marxist socialist theories today does not in the least signify a return to the seven-league boots of the childhood of the proletariat. No, it is a return to the puny, worn-out slippers of the bourgeoisie.

Bernstein's theory was the *first*, but also, at the same time, the *last* attempt to give a theoretical base to opportunism. We say "the last," because in Bernstein's system, opportunism has gone so far—both negatively, through its renunciation of scientific socialism, and positively, through its jumbling together of every bit of theoretical confusion available—that nothing remains to be done. Through Bernstein's book, opportunism has completed its theoretical development [just as it completed its practical development in the position taken by Schippel on the question of militarism], and has drawn its ultimate conclusion.

Not only can Marxist doctrine refute opportunism theoretically; it alone is able to *explain* opportunism as an historical phenomenon in the development of the Party. The world-historical forward march of the proletariat to its final victory is, indeed, not "so simple a thing." The original character of this movement consists in the fact that here, for the first time in history, the popular masses themselves, *in opposition* to all ruling classes, impose their will. But they must posit this will outside of and beyond the present society. The masses can only form this *will* in a constant struggle against the existing order, only within its framework. The unification of the broad popular masses with an aim reaching beyond the whole existing social order, of the daily struggle with the great world transformation—that is the task of the Social Democratic movement, which must successfully work forward on its road to development between two reefs: abandonment of the mass character or abandonment of the final aim; the fall back to sectarianism or the fall into bourgeois reformism; anarchism or opportunism.

Of course, more than a half a century ago the theoretical arsenal of Marxist doctrine already furnished arms that are effective against both of these extremes. But precisely because our movement is a mass movement and the dangers menacing it are not born in the human brain but in social conditions, Marxist doctrine could not assure us, in advance and once and for all, against the anarchist and opportunist deviations. Once they have taken on flesh in practice, they can be overcome only by the movement itself, though of course only with the help of the arms furnished us by Marx. Social Democracy has already overcome the lesser danger, the anarchist streak of childishness, with the "movement of the independents."³² It is presently in the process of overcoming the greater danger—opportunist dropsy.

With the enormous expansion of the movement in the last years, and the complexity of the conditions in which, and the objectives for which, the struggle must take place, it was inevitable that the moment come in which skepticism concerning the reaching of the great final goal, and hesitations concerning the theoretical aspect of the movement, made themselves felt. Thus, and only thus, can and must the great proletarian movement progress; the instants of vacillation and hesitation are far from a surprise for the Marxist doctrine: Marx predicted them long ago:

"Bourgeois revolutions," wrote Marx a half-century ago in his *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, "like those of the eighteenth century, rush onward rapidly from success to success; their dramatic effects surpass one another; men and things seem to be set in flaming diamonds; ecstasy is the prevailing spirit. But they are short-lived; they reach their climax quickly, and then society relapses into a long hangover before it soberly learns how to appropriate the fruits of its period of storm and stress. Proletarian revolutions, on the contrary, such as those of the nineteenth century, criticize themselves continually; constantly interrupt themselves in their own course; come back to what seems to have been accomplished in order to start anew; scorn with cruel thoroughness the half-measures, weaknesses, and wretchedness of their first attempts; seem to throw down their adversary only to enable him to draw fresh strength from the earth and again to rise up against them, still more gigantically; continually recoil in fear before the undefined enormity of their own goals—until the situation is created which renders all retreat impossible, and the conditions themselves cry out: '*Hic Rhodus, hic salta!*' Here is the rose. Dance here!"³³

This has remained true even after the elaboration of the doctrine of scientific socialism. The proletarian movement has not as yet, all at once, become Social Democratic—even in Germany. But it is *becoming* more Social Democratic

daily because and inasmuch as it continuously surmounts the extreme deviations of anarchism and opportunism, both of which are only moments of the movement of Social Democracy considered as a *process*.

For these reasons, the surprising thing is not the appearance of the opportunist current but rather its weakness. As long as it showed itself in isolated single cases concerning the practical activity of the Party, one could still suppose that it had behind it some serious theoretical base. But now that it has come to full expression in Bernstein's book, one cannot help exclaiming with astonishment: What? Is that all you have to say? Not a shadow of an original thought! Not a single idea that was not refuted, crushed, ridiculed, and reduced to dust by Marxism decades ago!

It was sufficient for opportunism to speak in order to prove that it had nothing to say. That is the only significance of Bernstein's book in the history of the Party.

And thus, while saying goodbye to the mode of thought of the revolutionary proletariat, to the dialectic, and to the materialist conception of history, Bernstein can thank them for the attenuating circumstances that they provide for his conversion. For only the dialectic and the materialist conception of history, magnanimous as they are, could make Bernstein appear as a predestined but unconscious instrument by means of which the rising working class expresses its momentary weakness in order, contemptuously and with pride, to throw it aside when it sees it in the light.

[We said that the movement *becomes* Social Democratic because and inasmuch as it overcomes the anarchistic and opportunistic deviations which arise necessarily with its growth. But overcome does not mean to let everything pass peacefully as it pleases God. *To overcome the present opportunist current means to reject it.*

Bernstein concludes his book by advising the Party that it should dare to appear as what it is: a democratic socialist reform party. In our opinion, the Party—that is, its highest organ, the Party congress—must follow this advice by proposing to Bernstein that he too appear formally as what he is: a petty-bourgeois democratic progressive.]

were slaughtered by French government forces.

CHAPTER 5

- 1 For the English translation, see *Evolutionary Socialism*, translated by Edith C. Harvey (New York: Schocken, 1961).
- 2 Ferdinand Lassalle (1825-64) founded the General Association of German Workers in 1863, the first mass party of the German proletariat. Though Lassalle sought to enlist Marx's support, Marx always kept some distance between them. For example, Marx sharply opposed his efforts to advance socialism by making alliances with the landed aristocracy.
- 3 That is, cartels and trusts.
- 4 *Neue Zeit*, 1897-98, No. 18, S. 555. (RL)
- 5 *Neue Zeit*, 1897-98, No. 18, S. 554. (RL)
- 6 Isaac Péréire (1806-80) was a French financier who founded the *Crédit Mobilier*. He was originally a follower of Saint-Simon. Marx first studied his work in 1845 and often commented on it.
- 7 Added to second edition: "In a note to the third volume of *Capital*, Engels wrote in 1894: 'Since the above was written (1865), competition on the world market has been considerably intensified by the rapid development of industry in all civilized countries, especially in America and Germany. The fact that the rapidly and enormously expanding modern productive forces grow beyond the control of the laws of the capitalist mode of exchange within which they are supposed to move impresses itself nowadays more and more even on the minds of the

capitalists. This is shown especially by two symptoms. First, by the new and general mania for protective tariffs which differs from the old protectionism especially by the fact that now the articles which are capable of being exported are the best protected. In the second place, it is shown by the cartels (trusts) of manufacturers in whole large spheres of production for the regulation of production, and thus of prices and profits. It goes without saying that these experiments are practicable only so long as the economic weather is relatively favorable. The first storm must upset them, and prove that although production assuredly needs regulation, it is certainly not the capitalist class which is fitted for the task. Meanwhile, the trusts have no other mission but to see to it that the little fish are swallowed by the big fish still more rapidly than before.'" (RL) (See *Capital*, Vol. III, p. 215.)

- 8 *Capital*, Vol. III, p. 368.
- 9 Konrad Schmidt (1865-1932) was a leading Social-Democrat and economist who corresponded with Engels. He was a founder of one of the main revisionist journals in Germany, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*.
- 10 Wolfgang Heine (1861-1944) was a major supporter of Bernstein who at the time proposed a "policy of compensation" in which the SPD would agree to higher defense spending in exchange for obtaining a more democratic suffrage system. After 1910 he moved closer to Luxemburg's position on military questions.
- 11 Gustav von Scholler (1838-1917) was an influential economist and statist socialist who founded the Association for Social

- Reform in 1872 to encourage a nexus between industry, the corporate state, and labor. He was derided by liberals and leftists as one of the *Kathedersozialisten*, or "Socialists of the Chair."
- 12 In the second edition, Luxemburg added the following footnote: "In 1872, Professors Wagner, Schmoller, Brentano, and others held a Congress at Eisenach at which they proclaimed noisily and with much publicity that their goal was the introduction of social reforms for the protection of the working class. These gentlemen, whom the liberal, Oppenheimer, calls '*Kathedersozialisten*' [Socialists of the Chair, or Academic Socialists] formed a *Verein für Sozialreform* [Association for Social Reform]. Only a few years later, when the fight against Social Democracy grew sharper, as representatives in the Reichstag these pygmies of '*Kathedersozialismus*' voted for the extension of the Antisocialist Law. Beyond this, all of the activity of the Association consists in its yearly general assemblies at which a few professorial reports on different themes are read. Further, the Association has published over one hundred thick volumes on economic questions. Not a thing has been done for social reform by the professors—who, in addition, support protective tariffs, militarism, etc. Finally, the Association has given up social reforms and occupies itself with the problem of crises, cartels, and the like."
- 13 This part answers Bernstein's book *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie* (Stuttgart: Verlag von J.H.W. Dietz Nachf, 1899), in which Bernstein responded to Luxemburg's critique of his position. Page references in parentheses in the text are to the English translation by Edith C. Harvey.
- 14 Richard van de Borcht, *Handwörterbuch der Staatswissenschaften*, I. (RL)
- 15 *Nota bene!* In the great diffusion of small shares, Bernstein obviously finds a proof that social wealth is beginning to pour shares on all little men. Indeed, who but petty bourgeois and even workers could buy shares for the bagatelle of one pound sterling or 20 marks? Unfortunately his supposition rests on a simple miscalculation. We are operating here with the nominal value of shares instead of their market value, something entirely different. For example, on the mining market, South African Rand mine shares are on sale. These shares, like most mining values, are quoted at one pound sterling or 20 paper marks. But already in 1899, they sold at 43 pounds sterling, that is to say, not at 20 but at 860 marks. And it is generally so in all cases. So that these shares are perfectly bourgeois, and not at all petty-bourgeois or proletarian "bonds on social wealth," for they are bought at their nominal value only by a small minority of shareholders. (RL)
- 16 Wilhelm Weitling (1808-71) was a self-educated worker who wrote a number of important works on socialism in the 1830s and 1840s. Marx at first spoke highly of him, though he soon became critical of Weitling's voluntarist approach. After 1848 Weitling emigrated to the United States, where he became a supporter of the Democratic Party.

17 The following footnote appears only in the first edition: "It is true that Bernstein answered our first series of articles in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* [i.e., Part I of this essay] in a seemingly broad manner, but in a way which merely betrayed his embarrassment. For example, he makes it easy for himself to answer our critique of his skepticism concerning crises by arguing that we have made the whole Marxist theory of crises into music of the future. But this is an extremely free interpretation of our words, for we merely explained the regular *mechanical periodicity* of the crises—more precisely, the ten-year cycle of crises—as a schema which corresponds only to the fully developed world market. As for the *content* of the Marxist theory of crises, we explained it as the only scientific formulation of the mechanism, as well as of the inner economic causes of *all* previous crises.

"Bernstein's answers to other points of our critique are still more astounding. To the argument, for example, that already, by their very nature, the cartels could offer no defense against the capitalist anarchy because—as the sugar industry shows—they create an exacerbated competition on the world market, Bernstein answers that this may very well be true, but the exacerbated sugar competition in England created a large fabrication of marmalade and preserves (p. 89). An answer which makes us think of the conversation exercises in Ollendorf's *Teach Yourself Language* book: 'The sleeve is short *but* the shoe is tight. The father is tall *but* the mother has gone to bed?'

"In the same logical context, Bernstein answers our proof that *credit* too cannot be a means of adaptation' against capitalist anarchy because, on the contrary, it increases this anarchy. Credit, he believes, alongside its disruptive character also has a positive 'Production-creative' character which Marx himself is said to have recognized. This argument about credit is not at all new to anyone who, basing himself on Marxist theory, sees in the capitalist society all the positive points of departure for the future socialist transformation of society. The question at issue was whether this positive character of credit which points it beyond capitalism can come to fruition in the capitalist society as well, whether it can master capitalist anarchy, as Bernstein thinks, or whether it itself does not rather degenerate into contradictions and only increase once more the anarchy, as we showed. Bernstein's repeated reference to the 'production creative capacity of credit,' which in fact forms the point of departure for the whole debate, is in this light merely a 'theoretical flight into the beyond'—of the domain of the discussion."

18 Eugen Böhm-Bawerk (1851-1914) founded the Austrian marginal utility school of economics. William Stanley Jevons (1835-82) was a major English theorist of marginal utility. Karl Menger (1840-1921) was a member of the Austrian psychological school which led to the development of marginalist economics.

19 Paragraph 14 of the Austrian Constitution gave the Hapsburg monarchy the right to suspend constitutional liberties.

20 A reference to the period prior to the revolution of March 1848 that obtained some important liberal reforms.

21 Marinism is the naval equivalent of militarism. Beginning in 1890 Germany sought to become a major naval power, leading to serious tensions with England.

22 Kiao-Cheou (Tsingtao) was an area of China occupied by Germany from 1898 to 1919.

23 In the second edition, the bracketed portion is replaced by: "In Germany, the era of great armaments begun in 1893, and the policy of world politics inaugurated with Kiao-Cheou, were paid for immediately with the following sacrificial victim: the decomposition of liberalism, the change of the Center Party (which passed from opposition to government). The recent Reichstag elections of 1907, fought under the sign of colonial policy, are at the same time the historical burial of German liberalism." (In the 1907 Reichstag elections the SPD's share of seats fell to forty-three, compared with eighty-one in the 1903 elections—its most severe electoral setback to date. In response, SPD leaders increasingly moved away from taking radical and anti-imperialist positions in order to garner additional votes.—Eds.)

24 Karl Kautsky (1854-1938), the leading theoretician of the Second International and one of the most important figures in German Social Democracy. He founded *Neue Zeit* as the SPD's main theoretical journal in 1883, co-authored the Erfurt Program (1891) which served as the programmatic basis of the Second International, and

authored numerous works on Marxist theory and history. Though at first he demurred from entering the debate over revisionism, he supported Luxemburg's position. Luxemburg broke with him in 1910. For the circumstances of their break, see chapter 8, below.

25 A reference to Marx's critique of Proudhon; Marx had written, "Proudhon wants to be a synthesis—he is a composite error." See *The Poverty of Philosophy*, MECW, p. 178.

26 For Luxemburg's estimate of Engels' Introduction to Marx's *Class Struggles in France* in subsequent years, see "Our Program and the Political Situation" (1918), below.

27 A reference to a phrase used in a debate with Luxemburg by Georg Vollmar (1850-1922), a reformist leader of the SPD from Bavaria, who said the effects of the Paris Commune of 1871 were so disastrous that the workers would have been better off going to sleep than initiating the revolution.

28 Followers of August Blanqui (1805-81), French socialist who held that a small grouping of resolute revolutionists could seize power on behalf of the proletariat. Blanqui participated in the 1830 Revolution and organized an unsuccessful insurrection in 1839. He was involved in numerous conspiratorial coups and spent a total of 35 years in prison.

29 The *Vossische Zeitung* was a liberal journal that advocated peaceful reform and state socialism. The *Frankfurter Zeitung* was a liberal journal edited by Friedrich Naumann (1860-1919), founder of the National Socialist Association. The *Frankfurter Zeitung*

later seems to have coined the phrase "bloody Rosa."

- 30 In 1884 and 1885 Bismarck proposed that the government award subsidies to steamship companies that linked Germany to its colonies. The Social Democratic representatives to the Reichstag were divided on the issue.
- 31 "Vollmar's state socialism" refers to Vollmar's belief that state intervention from above was needed to gradually introduce socialism. "The vote on the Bavarian budget" refers to the practice of Bavarian socialists (led by Vollmar) to vote for the budget proposed by the government of Bavaria—an act widely opposed at the time by other sections of the SPD. The "agrarian socialism of South Germany" refers to Vollmar's opposition to the dominant SPD position that the development of agribusiness would inevitably transform the peasantry into a rural proletariat and that this would be a historically "progressive" development. Max Schippel (1859-1928) was a right-wing SPD leader who opposed the creation of a people's militia and supported the existing military system. He also defended German expansion.
- 32 "Movement of the independents" was a group associated with the *Junge*, who were anarchists expelled from the SPD in 1894. Though she often critiqued anarchists, Luxemburg opposed their expulsion from the Party. She wrote in 1906: "Anarchism in our ranks is nothing but a left reaction against the excessive demands of the right. Since we have never kicked out anyone on the far right, we do not now have the right to evict the

far left" (quoted in J. P. Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg* [London: Oxford University Press, 1969], p. 248).

- 33 In one of Aesop's fables, this is addressed to a braggart who claimed to have made a great leap in Rhodes. It more generally means "now show us what you can do." In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), Marx uses this expression to illustrate what he termed the way in which, unlike "bourgeois revolutions," which "storm swiftly from success to success. . . proletarian revolutions. . . criticize themselves constantly . . . recoil again and again from the indefinite prodigiousness of their own aims, until a situation has been created which makes all turning back impossible, and the conditions themselves cry out: *Hic Rhodus, hic salta!*" [MECW 11, pp. 106-7]. Earlier, Hegel referred to this expression in the Preface to his *Philosophy of Right* (1820).

CHAPTER 6

- 1 Kurt Eisner (1867-1919) was a journalist and editor of *Vorwärts*, the leading Social Democratic newspaper in Germany, from 1898 to 1905. Initially a revisionist, he often clashed with Luxemburg. He opposed World War I on pacifist grounds and moved toward the left, later helping to found the United Social-Democratic Party (USPD), in which Kautsky also participated. In November 1918 he was a leader of the revolution in Bavaria. He was murdered in February 1919 by a reactionary.
- 2 *Kladderadatsch* means a great noise, muddle, or confusion.