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‘The American Worker’ and the Theory of Permanent Revolution: Karl Kautsky on Werner Sombart’s *Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?*

Introduction

One of the main peculiarities of American historical development has been the relative political weakness of the American labour movement. The classical bourgeois attempt to analyse the reasons for this phenomenon is Werner Sombart’s famous book *Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?*, first published in 1906. Though Sombart’s theses have long been a subject of debate among academics in both the US and Europe,² it is not generally known that Karl Kautsky, the foremost Marxist theoretician of that period, answered them with a comparative analysis of the peculiarities of capitalist development in Russia, the UK and the US, and their influence on the respective labour movements. Kautsky’s study, published in 1906 in the theoretical journal of the German social

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² See, for instance, Lipset 1977, pp. 31–149; Foner 1984, pp. 57–80; Heffer and Rovet (eds.) 1988; Lipset and Marks 2000.

democracy *Die Neue Zeit* under the title 'The American Worker',³ was part of a series of articles developing the idea that the Russian Revolution of 1905 would go beyond the framework of the classical bourgeois revolutions and lead to 'the ushering in of an era of European revolutions that will end with the *dictatorship of the socialist society*'.⁴ In the 1922 Introduction to his book *1905*, Trotsky remarked on Kautsky's position at that time:

The debate over the character of the Russian revolution had, even during that period, gone beyond the confines of Russian social democracy and had engaged the attention of the leading elements of world socialism. The Menshevik conception of bourgeois revolution was expounded most conscientiously, that is to say, most badly and candidly, in Cherevanin's book.⁵ As soon as it appeared, the German opportunists seized hold of it with glee. At Kautsky's suggestion I wrote an analytical review of Cherevanin's book in *Neue Zeit*.⁶ At the time, Kautsky himself fully identified himself with my views. Like Mehring (now deceased), he adopted the viewpoint of 'permanent revolution.' Today, Kautsky has retrospectively joined the ranks of the Mensheviks. He wants to reduce his past to the level of his present. But this falsification, which satisfies the claims of an unclear theoretical conscience, is encountering obstacles in the form of printed documents. What Kautsky wrote in the earlier – the better! – period of his scientific and literary activity (his reply to the Polish socialist Ljusnia,⁷ *his studies on Russian and American workers*, his reply to Plekhanov's questionnaire concerning the character of the Russian revolution,⁸ etc.) was and remains a merciless rejection of Menshevism and a complete theoretical vindication of the subsequent political tactics of the Bolsheviks, whom thickheads and renegades, with Kautsky today at their head, accuse of adventurism, demagoguery, and Bakuninism.⁹

³ Kautsky 1906a, pp. 676–83, 717–27, 740–52 and 773–87.

⁴ Kautsky 1905b. [Emphasis in the original.]

⁵ Tscherewanin 1908.

⁶ Trotsky included his review of Cherevanin's book as an appendix to the 1922 edition to his book *1905*. Trotsky 1971b, Chapter 24. See also the review of Cherevanin's book by Rosa Luxemburg, in Luxemburg 1971, pp. 339–71. This was explicitly mentioned as a vindication of the theory of permanent revolution by her disciple Karl Radek in his excellent brochure *The Paths of the Russian Revolution*, in Richardson (ed.) 1999, pp. 35–75.

⁷ Kautsky 1904a, pp. 588–98, 620–27, 652–57, 685–95, 732–40. This was a response to the criticism of Kautsky's 1902 book *The Social Revolution* by the Polish socialist Lusnia, whose real name was C.V. Kelles Krauz. See the praise and extended quotations from this study in the seventh chapter of Trotsky 1978.

⁸ Kautsky 1982, pp. 352–403.

⁹ Trotsky 1971b, p. viii, emphasis mine.

Kautsky's study was translated to Russian immediately after its publication, and printed in *seven* separate editions, usually under the title *The American and Russian Workers*, one of them with a preface by the future Bolshevik People's Commissar of Education, Anatoly Lunacharskii.¹⁰ In the fourth chapter of his book *Results and Prospects*, which summed up the lessons of the 1905 Revolution, Trotsky included the following extensive reference to *The American Worker*:

In his recent work on the American proletariat, Kautsky points out that there is no direct relation between the political power of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, on the one hand, and the level of capitalist development on the other. 'Two states exist' he says, 'diametrically contrasted one with the other. In one of them there is developed inordinately, i.e., out of proportion to the level of the development of the capitalist mode of production, one of the elements of the latter, and in the other, another of these elements. In one state – America – it is the capitalist class, while in Russia it is the proletariat. In no other country than America is there so much basis for speaking of the dictatorship of capital, while the militant proletariat has nowhere acquired such importance as in Russia. This importance must and undoubtedly will increase, because this country only recently began to take a part in the modern class struggle, and has only recently provided a certain amount of elbow room for it.' Pointing out that Germany, to a certain extent, may learn its future from Russia, Kautsky continues: 'It is indeed most extraordinary that the Russian proletariat should be showing us our future, in so far as this is expressed not in the extent of the development of capital, but in the protest of the working class. The fact that this Russia is the most backward of the large states of the capitalist world would appear', observes Kautsky, 'to contradict the materialist conception of history, according to which economic development is the basis of political development; but really', he goes on to say, 'this only contradicts the materialist conception of history as it is depicted by our opponents and critics, who regard it not as a *method of investigation* but merely as a ready-made *stereotype*.'¹¹ We particularly recommend these lines to our Russian Marxists, who replace independent analysis of social relations by deductions from texts, selected

¹⁰ Donald 1993, Appendix, nos. 115–19, 190, 213, pp. 296, 300–301.

¹¹ Kautsky, *American and Russian Workers*, Russian translation, St. Petersburg, 1906, pp. 4–5. [Note by Trotsky.]

to serve every occasion in life. Nobody compromises Marxism so much as these self-styled Marxists.

Thus, according to Kautsky, Russia stands on an economically low level of capitalist development, politically it has an insignificant capitalist bourgeoisie and a powerful revolutionary proletariat. This results in the fact that ‘struggle for the interests of *all* Russia has fallen to the lot of the *only now-existing strong class in the country* – the industrial proletariat. For this reason the industrial proletariat has tremendous political importance, and for this reason the struggle for the emancipation of Russia from the incubus of absolutism which is stifling it has become converted into a *single combat between absolutism and the industrial proletariat*, a single combat in which the peasants may render considerable support but cannot play a leading role. Does not all this give us reason to conclude that the Russian ‘man’ will take power sooner than his ‘master’?¹²

Kautsky’s study was also commended as a ‘penetrating analysis’ by the leading economist of the Second International, Rudolf Hilferding, in his book *Finance Capital*.¹³

Werner Sombart and the classical-Marxist theoreticians

During the early stages of his academic career, Sombart was close to Marxism, or at any rate studied Marx’s theory carefully. In his ‘Supplement and Addendum to Volume 3 of *Capital*’, Engels wrote: ‘In Braun’s *Archiv für soziale Gesetzgebung*, Vol. VII, No. 4, Werner Sombart gives an outline of the Marxian system which, taken all in all, is excellent. It is the first time that a German university professor succeeds on the whole in seeing in Marx’s writings what Marx really says, stating that the criticism of the Marxian system cannot consist of a refutation – “let the political careerist deal with that” – but merely in a further development.’ In March 1895, Engels even sent him a letter developing these ideas and pointing out what he considered to be Sombart’s mistaken views on the law of value and the historical process of formation of an average rate of profit.¹⁴ But, later the same year, the outstanding Marxist historian and revolutionary Franz Mehring was forced to defend Engels’s

¹² Trotsky 1978, Chapter 4. [Emphasis in the original.]

¹³ Hilferding 1981, p. 431, note 17.

¹⁴ Krause 1961, pp. 636–40.

book *The Condition of the Working Class in England* against Sombart's endorsement of its supposedly 'detailed refutation' by Bruno Hildebrand, a member of the German 'historical school' of bourgeois economics founded by Wilhelm Roscher.¹⁵

A year later, Mehring reviewed Sombart's brochure *Socialism and the Social Movement in the Nineteenth Century* and found it a typical professorial attempt to 'sublimate' Marxism in order to reassure the bourgeois public. Though emphasising that he did not consider Sombart to be 'an ordinary capitalist Know Nothing', Mehring argued that his attempt to make Marxism legal and respectable by separating economics from politics, theory from praxis, evolution from revolution, etc. would lead him nowhere. He recalled how another academician, Ferdinand Tönnies, also began by upholding an ethic suspended above the class struggles but had lately come out in defence of the Hamburg dockers, and concluded: 'It is to be hoped that Herr Sombart will also move forwards, but one must not forget that the *Quintessence of Socialism* he has just published contains all the elements that will afterwards enable him to develop for the German Philistines a comforting breviary about "The Lack of Perspectives of Social Democracy".'¹⁶

Sombart's response was to launch against Mehring 'a whole battery of the coarsest personal insults'.¹⁷ From then on, both men crossed swords several times, for instance when Sombart, while praising Marx as 'not only the *praeceptor Germaniae*, but the entire world's', rejected his theory of profit in favour of the liberal economist Schulze-Delitsch's, which defined it as 'intellectual wages [*geistigen Arbeitslohn*]' akin to the salaries of policemen, inventors, clerks and professors.¹⁸ On another occasion, Mehring criticised Sombart for arguing, in a 'cultural association' created for a workers' audience (the Bremen Goethebund), that historical materialism was untenable because Goethe had not written *Faust* out of economic motives.¹⁹ The father of Russian Marxism, Georgii Plekhanov, also criticised Sombart's 'corrections' of the theory of class struggle in his brilliant Introduction to the second Russian edition of his translation of the *Communist Manifesto*.²⁰

¹⁵ Mehring 1963a, pp. 26–32.

¹⁶ Mehring 1963b, pp. 135–43.

¹⁷ Mehring 1963c, pp. 222–8.

¹⁸ Mehring 1964, pp. 628–33.

¹⁹ Mehring 1966a, pp. 28–33.

²⁰ Plekhanov 1981, Vol. II, pp. 449–50.

Rosa Luxemburg took an active part in the debate against Sombart, refuting for instance his disproportionality theory of crises which attributed them to natural causes (the nature of gold and foodstuff production).²¹ Above all, she repeatedly criticised his attempt to set the German union officials against the socialist leaders on chauvinistic and bourgeois economic grounds. Her first article on this issue, written at Mehring's instance and with a laudatory prefatory note by him, appeared as early as 1900.²² In her classic study *The Mass Strike*, written seven years later and summing up some of the main lessons of the 1905 Russian Revolution, we find the following reference to Sombart:

From the concealment of the objective limits drawn by the bourgeois social order to the trade-union struggle, there arises a hostility to every theoretical criticism which refers to these limits in connection with the ultimate aims of the labour movement. Fulsome flattery and boundless optimism are considered to be the duty of every 'friend of the trade-union movement.' But as the social democratic standpoint consists precisely in fighting against uncritical parliamentary optimism, a front is at last made against the social democratic theory: men grope for a 'new trade-union theory,' that is, a theory which would open an illimitable vista of economic progress to the trade-union struggle within the capitalist system, in opposition to the social democratic doctrine. Such a theory has indeed existed for some time – the theory of Professor Sombart which was promulgated with the express intention of driving a wedge between the trade-unions and the social democracy in Germany, and of enticing the trade-unions over to the bourgeois position.²³

In his path-breaking book on the Jewish question, Kautsky denounced and refuted one of the most unpleasant aspects of Sombart's nationalism – his anti-semitism – which led him to become a fellow-traveller of the Nazis during the last decade of his life (he died in 1941).²⁴ Abram Leon dedicated a whole section of his work on the Jewish question – which, despite its problematic

²¹ Luxemburg 1972b, pp. 382–90.

²² Luxemburg 1972c, pp. 767–90.

²³ Luxemburg 1925, Chapter 7.

²⁴ Sombart's 1912 book *The Future of the Jews* already includes gems like this: 'Who would want to miss the racy Judiths and Miriams? To be sure, they must be racy and ready to remain so. We cannot tolerate this black-blond mix-up.' Quoted in Kautsky 1921a, p. 80. Sombart would be glad to know that his opposition to the 'black-blond mix-up' is staunchly supported by a certain political tendency in the modern Jewry.

definition of the Jewry as a 'people', is the main materialist study of the subject – to a refutation of Sombart's thesis, advanced in his book *The Jews and Modern Capitalism*, that the Jews were 'the founders of modern capitalism'.²⁵ But, for all their faults, Sombart's works, because of their wealth of historical data and the insights he gained from his acquaintance with Marx's work, always remained a subject of deep interest for Marxist theoreticians. That is especially the case of his massive *magnum opus* *Der moderne Kapitalismus*. When the first part appeared in 1902, Hilferding reviewed it at length,²⁶ and, thirty-seven years later, Trotsky still considered important to criticise it in one of his last books.²⁷

The revisionist debate

'The American Worker' was a continuation of Kautsky's ongoing struggle against the revisionist right wing of German Social Democracy, as can be seen from the explicit reference, in the section dealing with 'proletarian ministerialism', to 'the *enfant terrible* of revisionism', Eduard Bernstein. Originally a close friend of Friedrich Engels, Bernstein fell during his period of exile in London under the influence of the Fabian Society, and, in a series of articles first published in *Die Neue Zeit* and collected as a book in 1899 under the title *The Preconditions of Socialism and the Tasks of Social Democracy*, undertook a revision of Marxism along reformist lines.²⁸ At the instigation of Russian, Polish and (oddly enough) English leaders such as Plekhanov, Parvus, Luxemburg, and Belfort Bax,²⁹ Kautsky finally criticised Bernstein's attack on the central tenets of Marxism in the pages of *Die Neue Zeit*. His articles were collected in 1899 under the title *Bernstein und das sozialdemokratische Programm. Eine Antikritik*. The book was almost immediately translated to half a dozen languages and became one of the world classics of socialist literature.³⁰ Thanks to it and to his book *The Agrarian Question*, published

²⁵ Leon 1970, Chapter 4, Section A.

²⁶ Hilferding 1987, pp. 147–60.

²⁷ Trotsky 1963, pp. 24–51.

²⁸ Bernstein 1993.

²⁹ A good selection of documents on the first phase of the Revisionist Controversy, i.e. before the publication of Bernstein and Kautsky's books, is Tudor and Tudor (eds.) 1988. Cf. Luxemburg 1908. Plekhanov's articles defending dialectical materialism against Bernstein and Conrad Schmidt can be found in the second volume of his *Selected Philosophical Works*, published in 1981.

³⁰ No English version is available, but a French one was issued in 1900, see Kautsky 1900.

the same year, Kautsky established his reputation as the main theoretical authority of international Marxism until the outbreak of the First World War.

The section of 'The American Worker' dealing with 'proletarian ministerialism' also contains an explicit critical reference to the first practical application of the principles of revisionism: in 1899, the French socialist deputy Alexandre Millerand joined the bourgeois 'government of republican defence' of Waldeck-Rousseau (together with the butcher of the 1871 Paris Commune, General Gallifet) using the Dreyfus trial as an excuse, in an early application of Stalin's 'popular-front' policy. Lenin summed up the lessons of that experience in *What Is to Be Done?* as follows:

If Bernstein's theoretical criticism and political yearnings were still unclear to anyone, the French took the trouble strikingly to demonstrate the 'new method.' In this instance, too, France has justified its old reputation of being 'the land where, more than anywhere else, the historical class struggles were each time fought out to a decision . . .' (Engels, Introduction to Marx's *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*). The French socialists have begun, not to theorise, but to act. The democratically more highly developed political conditions in France have permitted them to put 'Bernsteinism into practice' immediately, with all its consequences. Millerand has furnished an excellent example of practical Bernsteinism; not without reason did Bernstein and Vollmar rush so zealously to defend and laud him. Indeed, if Social-Democracy, in essence, is merely a party of reform and must be bold enough to admit this openly, then not only has a socialist the right to join a bourgeois cabinet, but he must always strive to do so. If democracy, in essence, means the abolition of class domination, then why should not a socialist minister charm the whole bourgeois world by orations on class collaboration? Why should he not remain in the cabinet even after the shooting-down of workers by gendarmes has exposed, for the hundredth and thousandth time, the real nature of the democratic collaboration of classes? Why should he not personally take part in greeting the tsar, for whom the French socialists now have no other name than hero of the gallows, knout, and exile (*knouteur, pendeur et deportateur*)? And the reward for this utter humiliation and self-degradation of socialism in the face of the whole world, for the corruption of the socialist consciousness of the working masses – the only basis that can guarantee our victory – the reward for this is pompous *projects* for

miserable reforms, so miserable in fact that much more has been obtained from bourgeois governments!³¹

Bernstein's revisionist theories were condemned in September 1903 at the Dresden Congress of the German Social-Democratic Party, as was Millerand's ministerialism a year later, at the 1904 Amsterdam Congress of the Second International. But the Dresden 'victory' against 'theoretical revisionism', like the later 'victory' at the September 1905 Jena Congress of the SPD against 'trade-union' or 'practical' revisionism, proved to be illusory, as we will presently see.

The Russian Revolution of 1905 and German Social Democracy

'The American Worker' was, like the Industrial Workers of the World,³² a product of the Russian Revolution of 1905. More specifically, it was born out an attempt to offer a materialist analysis of the apparently paradoxical fact that a revolution led by the working class was taking place in one of the most backward areas of Europe, while the socialist movement continued to be relatively weak in the most highly developed industrial country: the United States.

The Russian Revolution of 1905 first confronted the parties of the Second International with practical revolutionary tasks after a spell of reaction of more than thirty years, following the massacre of the Parisian Communards in 1871. The Russian masses, by creating the councils of workers' delegates (Soviets) and implementing measures such as the workers' control of production, went in practice beyond the framework of the bourgeois state and society, and literally forced the best Marxist theoreticians of the period to come to terms with the crucial issue of the link between the minimum programme of democratic political and social reforms attainable within the framework of capitalist society, and the maximum programme demanding the expropriation of the bourgeoisie and the socialisation of the means of production.

The centre of Marxist theoretical elaboration before the outbreak of the First World War was not Empire of the Czars but Germany, the home of Marx and Engels and of the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD), the

³¹ Lenin 1902, Chapter 1, Section 1.

³² See Cannon 1973b.

major party of the Second International. The undisputed fountain spring of Marxist theory for the world socialist movement was the SPD's theoretical journal *Die Neue Zeit*, edited by Kautsky. In a 1908 article commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Die Neue Zeit*, Trotsky described the relationship between German and Russian socialism as follows:

The most frequent reproach made to the Russian party since its creation has been that it sees Russian life through German spectacles. . . . The reason for this reproach was the deep influence of German Social Democracy on the Russian party. But that influence was only possible because the German glasses had been built according to the laws of the international optics of the class struggles. . . . One of the strongest organs of the influence of the German party on Russian Social Democracy was *Die Neue Zeit*.³³

After explaining the crucial role of the journal in propagating the ideas of Marxism among the Russian intelligentsia, especially during the revisionist controversy, Trotsky continued:

Even before the outbreak of the Russian Revolution, when many European comrades, for easily understandable reasons, refused to take the Russian socialists seriously, *Die Neue Zeit* was an indefatigable supporter of the interests of the Russian Revolution before the forum of European socialism. During the revolution, it was with us and for us, not only at the time of our successes, but also during the difficult moments of our defeats. While the innumerable *raisonneurs* whispered their venomous sermons in our ears; while the liberal rabble obstinately repeated that we had nothing in common with the reasonably legal, respectable, moderate tactics of the European socialist parties; while the reactionary press shouted at the top of its voice that we were nothing but anarchists who put on our shoulders the honest tunic of the German Social Democracy in order to hide our criminal purposes; we could always, with the fullest assurance, show them the latest number of *Die Neue Zeit* and from its pages hurl in the face of our opponents and enemies the proud words: *We are flesh of the flesh and blood of the blood of international socialism*.³⁴

We see that, at that time, even the leaders of the most extreme sections of the Russian social democracy considered themselves faithful disciples of the

³³ Trotsky 1908, p. 7.

³⁴ Trotsky 1908, p. 10, emphasis in the original.

SPD leaders Bebel and Kautsky rather than as part of a left tendency within the Second International. As Trotsky put it, up to August 4, 1914 '*Lenin considered Kautsky as his teacher* and stressed this everywhere he could. . . . Speaking of Menshevism as the opportunistic wing of the Social Democracy, Lenin compared the Mensheviks not with Kautskyism but with revisionism. Moreover he looked upon Bolshevism as the Russian form of Kautskyism, which in his eyes was in that period identical with Marxism.'³⁵ In order to understand the significance of 'The American Worker', it is important to realise why Lenin saw himself for so long as 'only a translation into the language of Russian conditions of the tendency of Bebel-Kautsky'.³⁶

The rediscovery of the theory of permanent revolution

In retrospect, it is clear that the most important theoretical result of the 1905 Russian Revolution was the rediscovery by a brilliant group of Marxist intellectuals of the theory of permanent revolution, first elaborated by Marx and Engels in March 1850 in the 'Address to the Central Committee of the Communist League'.³⁷ The group included, besides Trotsky, Russians such as Parvus (Alexander Helphand), Poles such as Rosa Luxemburg, and Germans such as Franz Mehring and Karl Kautsky; though not all of them employed the term in the finished sense Trotsky did, namely as implying the wholesale collectivisation of the means of production.³⁸ Trotsky's mentor and close collaborator during the revolution, Parvus, for instance, limited its perspectives to a thorough democratisation of Russian economic and political life and the instauration of a reformist labour government along Australian lines.³⁹

But, within Russian social democracy, this perspective was represented before 1917 only by a tiny tendency led by Leon Trotsky, who rejected the artificial limitation of the Russian revolution to bourgeois demands and upheld the idea that the dictatorship of the proletariat could be established in backward

³⁵ Trotsky 1973a, p. 132, emphasis in the original.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ 'Le but de l'association est la déchéance de toutes les classes privilégiées, de soumettre ces classes à la dictature des prolétaires en maintenant la révolution en permanence jusqu'à la réalisation du communisme, qui doit être la dernière forme de constitution de la famille humaine.' Marx-Engels, 1977, pp. 568–69 and 1080–1.

³⁸ The phrase 'permanent revolution' was used to analyse the 1905 Russian Revolution, independently of Trotsky, in Luxemburg 1972a, pp. 485–90; Kautsky 1905a, pp. 460–8, 492–9, 529–37; Mehring 1966b, pp. 84–8.

³⁹ The main collection of articles by Parvus on the 1905 Revolution remains untranslated: see Parvus 1906. In French see Parvus 1905.

Russia, where serfdom was abolished as late as 1861. He argued that the peasantry, geographically dispersed and politically inarticulate, was incapable of playing an independent political role: it could only come to power under the leadership of the revolutionary section of the urban population. Since the Russian bourgeoisie had shifted to the camp of counterrevolution, only the industrial proletariat, numerically small but highly concentrated and class-conscious, could provide this leadership. Once in power, Trotsky continued, the proletariat would be compelled to go beyond the democratic tasks and place collectivism on the order of the day: the Russian revolution could therefore triumph only as a socialist revolution. The survival of a workers' government established on such primitive economic basis would ultimately depend on the success of the socialist revolution in the West.⁴⁰

The 1905 Revolution found the Russian Marxists split into two main tendencies, the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks, not, however, over strategic but over organisational issues, Lenin demanding a greater degree of centralisation than his opponents due to the lack of democratic liberties in the autocratic Russian régime. The revolution led to a programmatic break between them. While the Mensheviks clung to the idea that the future of the democratic revolution depended on maintaining an alliance between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, Lenin adopted an intermediate position between Plekhanov and Trotsky. The aim of the Russian revolution, he argued, was to create the best possible conditions for the development of capitalism, and therefore its central problem was the agrarian question. The bourgeoisie, however, was incapable of undertaking this task because the relatively high level of class differentiation within the Third Estate had led to the reactionary degeneration of liberalism. Out of fear of the mass struggle, the capitalists were ready to reach a compromise with the landowners and the Czar (i.e. to betray agrarian reform) which would lead to a slow and painful development of Russian capitalism along Prussian lines. As opposed to the Menshevik strategy of an alliance between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, Lenin argued that the revolution could only triumph as a result of an alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry, and that it would therefore be forced to make much more serious inroads into private property than the classical bourgeois

⁴⁰ For a more detailed analysis of these issues see Trotsky 1973c, pp. 55–73. The Marxist Internet Archive edition, taken from the appendix to Trotsky's biography of Stalin, carries the title: 'The Character of the Russian Revolution as Foreseen by Plekhanov, Lenin and Trotsky'.

revolutions. Those two classes, upon seizing power, would establish a joint 'democratic dictatorship', proclaiming the republic, the eight-hour working day and the most radical agrarian reform (including *land nationalisation*), which would enable Russia to embark in what Lenin called 'the American path of bourgeois development'.⁴¹ They would, moreover, carry the revolution to the West, where it would immediately assume a socialist character. But, because the peasantry would play the leading role in the revolutionary government, in Russia itself the revolution would stop short of the wholesale socialisation of the means of production.

In the exhilarating atmosphere of the revolution, Lenin sometimes made statements that went beyond that schema. For instance, in September 1905 he wrote: 'From the democratic revolution we shall at once, and precisely in accordance with the measure of our strength, the strength of the class-conscious and organized proletariat, begin to pass to the socialist revolution. We stand for uninterrupted revolution. We shall not stop half-way.'⁴² And, in a note written a few months later, but not published until 1926, he further argued that the defeat of the Russian workers would be certain unless the Western European socialist proletariat came to their assistance: 'The second victory will be *the socialist revolution in Europe*. The European workers will show us "how to do it," and then, together with them, we shall bring about the socialist revolution.'⁴³ But, for all the insights they provide into the dynamics of Lenin's thought (and that of his working-class followers), those were no more than outbursts of enthusiasm that contradict the official statements of Bolshevik policy, as elaborated in Lenin's theoretical writings of the pre-1917 period.

Kautsky, Lenin and Trotsky

In August 1908, Trotsky wrote to Kautsky that his above-quoted response to Plekhanov, 'Driving Forces and Prospects of the Russian Revolution', was 'the best theoretical statement of my own views, and gives me great political satisfaction'⁴⁴ – in other words, he considered it to be an endorsement of the theory of permanent revolution. Yet, in a review of that study published in the Bolshevik organ *Proletarii*, Lenin described it as 'a brilliant vindication of

⁴¹ For Lenin's analysis see Lenin 1962d, pp. 217–431; 1964a, pp. 13–102.

⁴² Lenin 1961, pp. 236–37.

⁴³ Lenin 1962a, pp. 91–92, emphasis in the original.

⁴⁴ Trotsky to Kautsky 11 August 1908. Quoted in Donald 1993, p. 91.

the *fundamental principles* of Bolsheviks tactics’, adding: ‘Kautsky’s analysis satisfies us completely. He has fully confirmed our contention that we are defending the position of revolutionary Social-Democracy against opportunism, and not creating any “peculiar” Bolshevik trend.’⁴⁵ Lenin returned to this idea in his book *The Agrarian Programme of the Social Democracy in the First Russian Revolution, 1905–07*:

The Bolsheviks, ever since the beginning of the revolution in the spring and summer of 1905, clearly pointed to the *source* of our tactical differences by singling out the concept of peasant revolution as one of the varieties of bourgeois revolution, and by defining the victory of the peasant revolution as ‘the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.’ Since then Bolshevism won its greatest *ideological* victory in international Social Democracy with the publication of Kautsky’s article on the driving forces of the Russian revolution.⁴⁶

At first sight, the endorsement of Kautsky’s analysis by both Trotsky and Lenin might seem paradoxical. Both Russian leaders could see in Kautsky’s answer to Plekhanov a confirmation of their own analysis because the German theoretician, not being able to read Russian and acquaint himself at first hand with the political life of the country, did not want to provide a definite answer to the strategic question separating both Lenin and Trotsky, namely whether the peasantry or the proletariat would play the leading role in the revolutionary government. He just wanted to make it clear that, given the correlation of class forces in Russian society, a bloc of the workers with the bourgeois-liberal Cadets was, in his opinion, out of the question. Agrarian reform was the heart of the democratic revolution, and the bourgeoisie was too closely linked with the landlords and foreign capital and too afraid of the workers to support the confiscation of the landed estates without compensation. The urban petty bourgeoisie, in turn, was too weak to play the role it played in the Paris Commune during the French Revolution. The social-democratic workers would be therefore forced to seize power together with the peasants to carry out the democratic revolution, and, from then on, a whole series of possible scenarios would develop according to the extent of the peasant war, the extension of the revolution beyond Russia’s borders, and so on.

⁴⁵ Lenin 1962d, pp. 372–3, emphasis in the original.

⁴⁶ Lenin 1962d, p. 353, emphasis in the original.

On the whole, Kautsky's argument tended to support more Trotsky's formula of 'the dictatorship of the proletariat leaning upon the peasantry' than Lenin's 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry'. For instance, in his 1904 study 'To What Extent Is the *Communist Manifesto* Obsolete?', originally published in German in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* (the organ of the SPD left wing, edited by Parvus, Luxemburg and Mehring) and later included as an introduction to a 1905 Polish edition of the *Manifesto*, Kautsky argued that, due the advanced extent of class differentiation within the Third Estate, 'today we can nowhere speak of a revolutionary bourgeoisie'. He explicitly referred to the 1850 'Address of the Central Committee of the Communist League' and to 'a bourgeois revolution, which, becoming permanent, grows beyond its own limits and develops out of itself a proletarian revolution' – although he did not conclude that it would necessarily lead to the complete collectivisation of the means of production.⁴⁷ But, when confronted with the actual revolution in the aftermath of the First World War, Kautsky would shrink from his former revolutionary analysis, as we will later see.

Kautsky's earlier writings on American socialism

To return to 'The American Worker', some readers may wonder what Kautsky's qualifications for writing that piece might have been, given the fact that he never lived in the United States. It could be argued in his defence that he was not only the undisputed theoretical leader of a world-wide mass workers' organisation – the Second International – but knew English perfectly, as well as four other modern languages and two ancient ones. He clearly followed the American scene closely and his interest in the US labour movement was neither occasional nor that of a detached outsider. The *Sachregister* of Blumenberg's bibliography of Kautsky's writings lists thirty-one items on American political and economic issues, ranging from 1880 to 1934, of which nineteen dealt specifically with the US labour movement.⁴⁸ Among the latter, besides the item on Sombart, we find a 1880 note on the American union federations, a 1886 article on the Knights of Labor and the struggle for the eight-hour working day, an 1887 article on 'Socialism in Russia and America', and five letters to American labour newspapers.⁴⁹ Of this material, we will

⁴⁷ Kautsky 1904b, pp. 155–64.

⁴⁸ Blumenberg 1960.

⁴⁹ Kautsky 1902b; 1902c; 1907; 1908; 1909f.

only review the pieces that appeared in *Die Neue Zeit*, which, as a theoretical organ, tended to publish longer articles summing up the polemics carried out in daily newspapers such as *Vorwärts*.

In 1889, Kautsky published a review of Edward Bellamy's famous utopian novel *Looking Backward, 2000–1887*, which he considered worthless as a work of art. The plot was absurd, the characters foolish, and the author had not understanding whatsoever of the modern labour movement: the commonwealth of the future was full of housewives, preachers and rich people no longer anxious about losing their fortune. But the book was nevertheless significant:

Socialism has until now been an exotic growth in America; it was considered a German product. And in fact the socialist movement, if not composed exclusively of Germans, was an outgrowth of German socialism. The task of creating, on the foundation of international scientific socialism, a truly American labour party, with its own literature, programme and tactics, is just now beginning to be undertaken. In view of this situation, Bellamy's book has a great symptomatic significance. It shows the power of the American labour movement; the fact that it forces to deal with social problems even bourgeois circles which are neither theoretically nor practically under the influence of European socialism.

Given the anti-theoretical cast of mind of the American workers, Kautsky concluded, *Looking Backward* could even prove useful as propaganda material.⁵⁰ In the end, the book gave birth to an ephemeral but for a time numerically considerable network of so-called 'Nationalist clubs', composed mostly of clerks and academic middle-class advocates of the nationalisation of the means of production.

Kautsky returned to the subject of the American worker six years later, in a very interesting short notice written in defence of Friedrich Sorge, whose history of the American labour movement was then being serialised by *Die Neue Zeit*. Sorge had chastised the sectarian Socialist Labor Party for refusing to take part in the New York election campaign of 1886 (the labour ticket's candidate was Henry George, but Sorge argued that Marxists had to take part in it as an organised tendency, because the masses were flocking to its support and therefore the election provided an excellent opportunity for educating and recruiting workers), for supporting the Progressive Labor Party

⁵⁰ Kautsky 1889, pp. 268–76.

(the left split from the 1886 labour ticket) only a few days before the 1887 elections, for failing to come to the defence of the Haymarket Square martyrs on the grounds that they were anarchists, and for belittling the trade-union movement on the basis that it was not socialist. Above all, he dismissed as hopelessly sectarian the Socialist Labor Party's attempt to set up its own minuscule 'red unions' under the pretentious name of Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance of the United States and Canada. The newspaper edited by Daniel De Leon retorted by calling Sorge's pieces 'humoristic articles' and 'side-splitting harlequinades', and described their author as 'an otherwise harmless and law-abiding German inhabitant of Hoboken'.

Kautsky was clearly shocked by that torrent of abuse: 'Our American reports by the pen of F.A. Sorge,' he wrote,

are generally recognised, even in enemy circles, as extraordinarily valuable and instructive contributions to the understanding of the American labour movement. That is not however the opinion of our American sister organ, *The People* of New York. . . . In Europe it is, to put it mildly, quite unusual for a party organ to employ such a language against a comrade, who is not some newly arrived youngster, but a veteran who took part in the great struggles of 1848 and 1849, and since his emigration to America has been an untiring worker for the proletarian cause, the trusted friend of Marx and Engels, and the soul of the [First] International in America.

He attributed the SLP's vicious style to a sectarianism born of the particularly hostile American conditions:

Just now Social Democracy had nowhere to struggle against such difficulties as in America. The disunion and petty jealousies among the different socialist organisations are if possible even greater than in England. While in the latter these drawbacks have to a certain extent been balanced by great advances in the socialist consciousness of the proletariat, the mental effervescence lately to be seen in America has not yet led to a considerable furtherance of the socialist movement. On the contrary, some socialist organisations have even experienced a decline. Whether the fault lies in the American workers or in the socialists, whether the former are too limited and egoistical or the latter do not sufficiently understand the workers, or finally whether both are to be blamed for that situation – that is difficult to determine from here. But it is clear that, just as such a situation demands criticism, it must lead to particularly irritable reactions to it.

He asked the De Leonites to stoop the flood of invectives ('let us call them Americanisms') and concluded: 'Sorge's reports cannot be more outstandingly vindicated than by the article in *The People*. We are very glad to announce the launching, in the coming numbers of *Die Neue Zeit*, of a long series of articles by our venerated friend, which have for some time been in our hands but whose publication had until now been delayed due to lack of space'.⁵¹

It should be added that, on this issue, Kautsky was in complete agreement with Engels, who recommended the publication of Sorge's work in book form to the SPD publishing house, although, in the end, nothing came of this proposal. In a letter sent from London dated 12 May 1894, Engels wrote to Sorge:

The Social Democratic Federation here shares with your German American Socialists [the SLP] the distinction of being the only parties that have managed to reduce the Marxist theory of development to a rigid orthodoxy, which the workers have not to reach themselves by their own class feeling, but which they have to gulp down as an article of faith at once and without development. That is why both of them remain mere sects and come, as Hegel says, from nothing through nothing to nothing.⁵²

Sorge's book was finally published in English during the 1970s and 1980s in two volumes, the first of which was unfortunately edited by the Stalinist historian Philip Foner, who managed both to praise Sorge in the preface as the father of American Marxism and to describe him in the footnotes as a white-supremacist, male-chauvinist sectarian.⁵³

Kautsky and the American correspondents to *Die Neue Zeit*

Kautsky received regular reports on US conditions from correspondents to *Die Neue Zeit* who either lived in or visited the United States. The visitors included Marx's daughter Eleanor Marx Aveling and her partner Edward Aveling, whose book on the situation of the working class in the United States first appeared as a series of articles in *Die Neue Zeit*.⁵⁴ The Austro-British publicist and historian of socialism Max Beer also spent some time in New

⁵¹ Kautsky 1895, pp. 183–5.

⁵² Marx and Engels 1953, p. 263.

⁵³ Sorge 1977; 1987. On Sorge see further the highly laudatory obituary by Mehring, Mehring 1963d, pp. 487–9, published in this issue.

⁵⁴ Aveling and Marx Aveling 1969.

York and wrote many articles on American issues.⁵⁵ But most of the reports were sent by American socialist leaders such as Sorge, Algie Simons, Louis Boudin,⁵⁶ Algernon Lee, Morris Hillquit,⁵⁷ William English Walling, and, last but not least, Hermann Schlüter, the eminent historian of the labour movement and editor of the German organ of the Socialist Party's left-wing *New Yorker Volkszeitung*, whose major books on the First International in America and on the Chartist movement in England still remain to be translated to English.⁵⁸

In the first Appendix to 'The American Worker', Kautsky praised the theoretical organ of the left wing of the Debsian Socialist Party, the *International Socialist Review*, at that time edited by Algie Martin Simons, who also translated to English, together with his wife Mary, two of Kautsky's best books: *The Social Revolution* (1902) and *The Road to Power* (1909). In Section V of 'The American Worker' ('Capitalism in the United States') there is an explicit reference to Simons's brochure *Class Struggles in America*, first published in 1903, as 'the excellent work of Comrade Simons, recently published, which offers a short synopsis of the socioeconomic development of the United States from its beginnings'. Simons's booklet, published by the SP left-wing publishing house owned by Charles H. Kerr, grew in successive editions from 32 pages in 1903, to 64 in the second edition of 1906 quoted by Kautsky, to 120 pages in the third edition of 1907. A German version was published in 1909 as a supplement to *Die Neue Zeit*.⁵⁹ When an enlarged 325-pages-long edition by Macmillan appeared two years later under the more misleading title *Social Forces in American History*, Kautsky praised it as follows:

⁵⁵ See especially his series of articles on the birth of American imperialism – the Spanish-American War and its aftermath: Beer 1898a, pp. 676–80, 708–14; 1898b, pp. 473–6; 1898c, pp. 743–54; 1899, pp. 457–62, 488–92; 1900, pp. 578–86; 1901, pp. 758–66.

⁵⁶ Boudin 1906. A German version was published three years later with a fascinating introduction by Kautsky, mainly dealing with the bourgeois subjective theory of value ('marginal utility' theory) and individualist ethics, and praising the book as the best overall refutation of the critics of Marx: Boudin 1909. A Russian version of the book by Vera Zasulich was published in St. Petersburg in 1908, and reissued after the Bolshevik Revolution in Moscow in 1920.

⁵⁷ The German version of Hillquit's *History of Socialism in the United States* was the main source on the history of American socialism for European continental Marxists. In his autobiography, Trotsky described Hillquit as 'the ideal socialist leader for successful dentists'.

⁵⁸ Schlüter 1918; 1916. The first version of Schlüter's book on Chartism, published as a brochure, was reviewed by Engels and this review now appears in the German edition of the Marx-Engels Collected Works (MEGA). Schlüter wrote an important historical work in English: Schlüter 1965. See also the highly laudatory review of one of his early books by Franz Mehring. Mehring 1907, pp. 347–9, also published in this issue.

⁵⁹ Simons, 1975.

It is not necessary to offer a description of the contents of this book to the readers of the *Die Neue Zeit*. We have already published as a supplement, in 1909, a work by comrade Simons called *Class Struggles in America*, which contained the main ideas of the present work. He has now expanded and polished that short overview, making it more clear and persuasive. It is to be desired that it will also appear in German. It is valuable both as an illustration of the fruitfulness of the materialist conception of history, and as a new building stone for the construction of a single universal materialist history, which is gradually reaching its completion. In its present form, the book presupposes that the reader is already acquainted with the most important facts of American history. But it should not be difficult for German readers to add by themselves the necessary information. They will receive therewith a quite clear overview of the history of the United States.⁶⁰

However, Kautsky's praise for Simons's book should not be interpreted as an unqualified endorsement of its theses, which for a contemporary reader are obviously marred by populist and racist prejudices – notably in the analysis of the Civil War and Reconstruction. When Simons's book *The American Farmer* appeared in 1902,⁶¹ Kautsky wrote a laudatory review, which however warned that the book tended to blur the dividing line between the workers and the rural middle class. Though both classes should strike together against their common exploiters, Kautsky argued, they should organise separately, because the Socialist Party could not cater to the prejudices of a historically doomed class.⁶² It is important to remember in this context that Kautsky's major book *The Agrarian Question*, which appeared three years earlier, was, like his book against Bernstein, born of a polemic against petty-bourgeois revisionists within the SPD. In the 1894 Frankfurt Congress and the subsequent 1895 Breslau Congress of the SPD, the Marxists engaged in a major debate with the leaders of the 'agrarian revisionists', Eduard David and Georg von Vollmar. These figures were based in South-Western Germany, a region where the small peasant class was particularly numerous, and demanded protective measures in order to retard its demise, even at the expense of the workers' living standards. Clearly, Kautsky detected similar leanings in Simons's work.⁶³

⁶⁰ Kautsky 1912.

⁶¹ Simons 1975.

⁶² Kautsky 1902a.

⁶³ Salvatori 1979, pp. 48–59.

Simons did not understand or heed Kautsky's advice. In the December 1905 issue of the *International Socialist Review*, he reprinted Frederick Jackson Turner's essay on the significance of the frontier in American history with an introduction describing it as 'without doubt the greatest contribution yet made in the application of the materialistic conception of history to American conditions'.⁶⁴ Seven years later, we find him arguing, in article entitled 'No Populism in the American Socialist Party', that the agrarian programme adopted by the May 1912 Indianapolis convention of the Socialist Party at his initiative made no principled concessions to the small agricultural capitalists.⁶⁵ As a result of these unresolved contradictions, Simons began to shift steadily to the right from 1905 on, and, after the outbreak of the First World War, went all the way down from serving as an organiser for the Wisconsin Loyalty Legion, to become director of the personnel department of an industrial corporation, teacher of business management at the University of Wisconsin, a Hoover supporter in 1928, and, finally, a campaigner against public health insurance on behalf of the American Medical Association.⁶⁶

Imperialism and the labour aristocracy

The main shortcoming of 'The American Worker' is the scant attention Kautsky pays to the issue of imperialism and its impact on the labour movement, especially by furthering the development of a labour aristocracy and bureaucracy in the imperialist countries. That was due to the fact that European Marxist theoreticians began to deal with those issues at length for the first time the following year (1907) when a major debate on the colonial question took place at the Stuttgart Congress of the Second International.⁶⁷ As part of the controversy over the colonial question Parvus published his work *The Colonial Policy and the Collapse of Capitalism*, never translated to English though commended by Kautsky and Hilferding,⁶⁸ and Kautsky his brochure on socialism and colonialism which, besides offering a pioneering materialist analysis of modern imperialism, contains some profound remarks on the

⁶⁴ Kreuter and Kreuter 1969, pp. 66, 71; Shannon 1967, pp. 18–19.

⁶⁵ Simons 1913, pp. 597–602.

⁶⁶ Glaser 1955, pp. 419–34. This hostile article by a bourgeois historian contains some remarkable insights into Simon's peculiar blend of populism and Marxism.

⁶⁷ See Petith 1969, pp. 325–37 and Lenin 1962c, pp. 75–81.

⁶⁸ Parvus 1907. See the laudatory review of this book by Hilferding: Hilferding 1907, pp. 687–8.

peculiarities of US historical development (see especially Chapter 4: 'Work Colonies' and 5: 'Old Style Exploitation Colonies').⁶⁹ Three years later, the Austro-Marxist economist Rudolf Hilferding would publish his *magnum opus* *Finance Capital: A Study of the Latest Phase of Capitalist Development*.⁷⁰ Together with the 1902 study by the British economist John A. Hobson's *Imperialism: A Study*, Hilferding's book provided the theoretical basis for Lenin's *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, whose immediate aim was to uncover the economic and class reasons for the outbreak of the First World War and the collapse of the Second International.

The analysis of the role of the labour aristocracy and bureaucracy as the social basis of reformism within the working-class movement was pioneered by two ultra-left theoreticians: the American Daniel De Leon in his 1903 brochure *Two Pages from Roman History*,⁷¹ and the Dutch 'Tribunist' Anton Pannekoek in his 1909 book *The Tactical Differences in the Labour Movement*.⁷² But the conclusions they eventually drew from their analyses were non-sequiturs: organisational sectarianism and dual unionism in the case of De Leon; opposition to communist participation in parliamentary elections and trade unions, anti-party 'council communism', and an early version of Third Worldism in the case of Pannekoek.⁷³

Kautsky dealt with one aspect of these processes, the rise of a counter-revolutionary union bureaucracy, in the last major series of articles he wrote on the United States: a polemic with the SPD right-wing union leaders over the statistics on the standard of living of the American workers and over the counterrevolutionary role of the American union bureaucrat Samuel Gompers on the occasion of his visit to Germany in late 1909. In order to understand the reasons for the heated character of the exchange and its implications, it

⁶⁹ Kautsky 1975. Lenin praised it in his book on imperialism, written when he was already a bitter enemy of Kautsky.

⁷⁰ See the review of this work by Kautsky: Kautsky 1911b, pp. 764–72, 797–804, 838–64, 874–83. A partial English version is available at the Marxist Internet Archive website as *Finance Capital and Crises*.

⁷¹ De Leon 1988. In 1920, Lenin wrote to Bukharin: 'I think we *should* publish in Russian De Leon's *Two Pages* with Fraina's foreword and notes. I shall also write a few words. If you agree, *will you give the word* through the State Publishing House.' Lenin 1970, p. 536, emphasis in the original. Louis Fraina (Lewis Corey), a protégé of De Leon, was the ideologist of early American communism.

⁷² Pannekoek 1909. This still untranslated brochure was reviewed and praised by Lenin: Lenin 1963b, pp. 347–52.

⁷³ On Pannekoek and his tendency see Lenin 1966 and Trotsky 1972, Vol. I, pp. 137–52.

is necessary to comprehend how the decline in the political temperature of Europe after the failure of the 1905 Russian Revolution affected the inner life of the SPD.

Under the invigorating influence of the 1905 Russian Revolution, the Jena Congress of the SPD convened in September of 1905, had adopted a resolution endorsing the use of the mass political strike in the fight for electoral and other democratic rights, although, at the instance of Bebel, it was described as a defensive tactic against the expected assault of the bourgeoisie on the growing gains of the socialist movement. However, at a secret conference of the SPD executive [*Parteivorstand*] and the general commission of 'free' (i.e. social-democratic) trade unions, led by its chairman Carl Legien, held on 16 February 1906, the party executive pledged itself 'to try to prevent a mass strike as much as possible'. If it were nevertheless to break out, the party would assume the sole burden of leadership: the trade unions would not participate in it officially, and agreed only 'not to stab it in the back'. The costs of a general strike would have to be covered by the party alone – an obvious impossibility. The agreement amounted to a practical annulment of the resolution of the Jena Congress, and was soon ratified by the resolution of the September 1906 Mannheim Congress, again drafted by Bebel, explicitly recognising that the party executive could undertake no action which the trade unions would not approve of, thus giving them effective control over the SPD. The unions' source of strength lay not only in their membership, which was more than twice that of the Party, but above all in their financial resources: in the fiscal year 1906–7 their income was *fifty times* greater than the party income. The radical *Leipziger Volkszeitung* (edited by Luxemburg and Mehring) drew from these events the bitter conclusion that ten years of struggle against revisionism had been in vain, 'for the revisionism we have killed in the party rises against in greater strength in the trade unions'.⁷⁴

During all these struggles, and indeed several years before them and up to the end of 1909, Kautsky remained a steadfast supporter of the revolutionary wing of the SPD (whose strongholds were the women's organisation, the youth movement and the Party school) and one of its main mouthpieces before the Second International. In 1902, he had published a book called *The Social Revolution*, whose Second Edition in 1907, revised in order to sum up the lessons of the 1905 Russian Revolution, was hailed as a triumph for

⁷⁴ Schorske 1970, pp. 28–58. For the income figures see p. 93.

Bolshevism by Lenin.⁷⁵ In 1905, he wrote an enthusiastic introduction to a book by Henriette Roland-Holst (a close associate of Luxemburg) on the mass strike, which alarmed the cautious Bebel.⁷⁶ Then, besides the series of articles we have already mentioned defending the theory of permanent revolution, in 1909, Kautsky wrote what Lenin considered his best book, *The Road to Power*, defending the traditional Marxist ideas that ministerialism and budget voting were tantamount to moral and political suicide, and affirming more clearly than before the revolutionary implications of imperialism. The SPD executive sternly opposed the publication of the book and demanded the watering down of a series of passages, fearing that they would bring down on them a trial for high treason (Karl Liebknecht was then serving a prison sentence for this brochure *Militarism and Anti-Militarism*). Kautsky finally agreed that the theses of the book should be presented as his personal opinion and not as an official statement of party policy, to the great indignation of his friend and future Spartakusbund leader Clara Zetkin.⁷⁷

Kautsky's polemic with the union bureaucracy

In *The Road to Power*, Kautsky showed that the purchasing power of US wages had stagnated for more than a decade, in spite of all the industrial struggles of the American workers, and argued that the rise in nominal wages had been more than counteracted by the rise in prices (in no little measure due to the growth of trusts and employers' organisations) and by the increase in the intensity of labour, as reflected especially in the growth of piece-wages. This led to a furious exchange with the organs of the trade-union right wing, especially the *Grundstein* and the *Korrespondenzblatt der Generalkommission der Gewerkschaften Deutschlands*, which accused him of being 'an opponent of union organisation' and of 'belittling and undervaluing' trade-union work.

Kautsky countered by arguing that the industrial struggles could raise wages at a given moment, but could not determine their long-term evolution, which depended on deeper economic processes. Given a rising tendency, the unions could raise wages more quickly; given a declining one, they could slow down their diminution. But they could not control these tendencies at will as the reformists argued. The unions were able 'to maintain wages at a

⁷⁵ Kautsky 1972. Lenin 1962d, p. 354.

⁷⁶ Kautsky, Vorwort Roland-Holst 1905, in Adler (ed.) 1954, pp. 467-9.

⁷⁷ Ratz 1967, pp. 432-77.

relatively higher level than they would otherwise reach, but they cannot guarantee an uninterrupted absolute rise in wages'.⁷⁸ If they wanted to be able to withstand the concentrated power of the capitalists and their state, they were forced to become more and more political and had to be prepared to employ their most powerful weapon, the mass political strike.

The English trade unions understood perfectly well that they could no more move forward with purely economic methods, and constituted themselves into a political party, which has already given them considerable influence. The strength of the Austrian proletariat also rests on the intimate collaboration between the party and the unions. They would never dream of such a thing as rigorously separating both fields. Each political struggle of the Social Democracy is also a struggle of the unions, and each industrial struggle also a concern of the party.

In Germany the spheres of influence of both organisations are still strongly separated due to historical causes, though that has not proved to be to the advantage of the proletariat. But the great struggles that we are going to confront will closely unite the party and the unions into one mighty phalanx, in which both parts will not hamper each other, but on the contrary will encourage and strengthen each other for the fight.

To accelerate this process by laying stress on those great goals that can only be achieved through a common struggle of the party and the unions, by emphasising the growing impotence to which isolation will condemn both sides – that was the major task that I set myself while writing *The Road to Power*.

I did not completely realise at that time, that by doing that I was going to raise the opposition of the mere *routiniers*, whose hearts have been weakened by treading the beaten path. But even among them I had expected more understanding than what I found in my critic of the *Korrespondenzblatt*. He has placed himself in the camp of Rexhäufer and Gompers.⁷⁹

The exchange over the American statistics was only the first round in the polemic between Kautsky and the SPD union organs. When Samuel Gompers, the leader of the American Federation of Labor, visited Germany in late 1909, he was praised by the leader of the trade-union right wing of the SPD, Karl Legien, as 'a true revolutionary, who seeks to unite the proletarian masses'.

⁷⁸ Kautsky 1909b, p. 523. Emphasis in the original.

⁷⁹ Kautsky 1909c, p. 832.

Kautsky reminded Legien that ‘Gompers is an opponent, not only of the special form that the socialist movement has assumed in America, but above all *an opponent of the proletarian class struggle*’.⁸⁰ After quoting one of Gompers’s typical Panglossian tirades about the harmony and trust that should prevail between the capitalists, their government and their wage slaves, Kautsky added:

It cannot be said that this blissful trustfulness stems from the fact that in America the government and the capitalists are especially friendly towards the workers. There is scarcely a more unscrupulous and vulgar capitalist class than the American, and there is scarcely a country in which the capitalist class has a more exclusive control of the means of political power, in which the laws are more shamelessly manipulated (and, when profitable, violated) for the benefit of the capitalists and to the detriment of the workers, than the United States. Nevertheless Gompers is full of trust.

His babbling about class harmony is however not an occasional speech to please the bourgeoisie but the true content of his political work. Thanks to it he has been able to become *vice-president* of the Civic Federation, a capitalist foundation created some years ago due to the rise of American socialism, which set itself the task of ‘bringing together’ workers and bourgeois. In actual fact it is an organisation of struggle against socialism and the proletarian class struggle, which, thanks to the large amounts of money at its disposal, is able to conduct an energetic propaganda.⁸¹

Of course, the union bureaucrat took pains to hide those facts from his European audiences:

Gompers plays his double role as president of the AFL and vice-president of the Civic Federation only in America. In Europe he appears exclusively as president of the union federation. He forgot his role as vice-president of a bourgeois institution while crossing the ocean. Mr. Gompers plays to the role of socialist-eater only in stages where his clique is a sure one. Caution is the best part of bravery.⁸²

In fact, Gompers had travelled to Europe in order to look for support there, after the spectacular failure of his policies had undermined his position in the US.

⁸⁰ Kautsky 1909d, p. 678, emphasis in the original.

⁸¹ Kautsky 1909d, p. 679, emphasis in the original.

⁸² Kautsky 1909d, p. 680.

He praises his 'labour policy' as if it were to be thanked for the fact that the standard of living in America is higher than in Europe. That is ridiculous humbug. The higher standard of living of the American workers has not been *won* during the last years but *inherited* from their ancestors. It was above all a consequence of the previous presence of unappropriated lands, from which everyone who wanted to become independent received as much as he needed. . . . But this superiority, about which Mr. Gompers is so conceited, is *rapidly disappearing*.

That is clearly proved by the drying up of the German emigration to America. A few decades ago, a German worker still improved his situation considerably by emigrating to the United States; for that reason many went there to make their fortune. Today the superiority of American living standards has become so minimal, that emigration doesn't pay anymore.

The German worker has in general *raised* his standard of living during the last decades, while that of the American worker has *declined*. According to the often-mentioned 1896 statistics, the buying power of his wages stood 4.2 percent above the average for the decade 1890–99. In 1905 it was only 1.5 percent above the average, and even that percentage must surely have diminished as a consequence of the crisis.

Precisely during the decade in which the American labour movement was dominated by Mr. Gompers, the upward movement of the American working class reached a standstill.

We know very well, that that depended on factors for which Gompers is not accountable. The exhaustion of the reserve of free lands, the influx of masses of workers with lower living standards, the appearance of large-scale industrial enterprises in the South, and, last but not least, the strengthening of the capitalist associations have brought about this result.

But that also proves that Gompers has no real reason for bragging about the superiority of American over European working conditions, presenting it before the European workers as the fruit of his policy of harmony and trust.

Mr. Gompers has not created the degrading tendencies of capitalism nowadays so strongly at work in America, but he has done his best to pave the way for them, because his policy of class cooperation has condemned the proletariat to complete political impotence.

The proletariat can only acquire political power by uniting in a special political class organisation. Gompers and his men have exerted all their influence to make such an organisation impossible. The proletarians must

not build a special workers' party, but sell their votes to the highest bidder among the bourgeois candidates – not, of course, in the vulgar sense of selling their votes for *money*, but of giving them to those bourgeois candidates who make them more *promises*.

A more ridiculous, corrupting and politically demoralising policy is hardly imaginable. Thanks to it there is no democratic industrial land in which the worker is treated with more contempt by the government, and especially by the judicial power, than America.⁸³

In the presidential elections of 1908, Gompers had prevailed on the AFL to support the Democratic candidate Bryan, who was defeated by the Republican candidate Taft. After that fiasco, Gompers left for Europe seeking for support among his fellow bureaucrats. Kautsky concluded his article by advising his comrades 'to be always mindful that every hand they raise to applaud Gompers, is a slap in the face of our American party comrades, who have no more dangerous and poisonous enemy than Samuel Gompers'.⁸⁴

In a second article against Gompers, Kautsky was forced to come to the defence of the Debsian SP left-wing German organ, the *New Yorker Volkszeitung*, which had been accused by the *Korrespondenzblatt* of advocating a split among the ranks of the AFL.⁸⁵ On the contrary, Kautsky argued, the policy of the *Volkszeitung* had always been to preserve the unity of the American industrial organisations while fighting against the Gompersian spirit of the AFL. Kautsky called the Civic Federation 'a gang of the filthiest and most bitter among our enemies', and wondered how Legien could consider himself a friend of Gompers.⁸⁶ While Gompers's visit to Germany lasted, the controversy continued to rage over the pages of the social-democratic press.⁸⁷

We have already remarked that Kautsky's criticism of Gompers was a projection of the struggle against the German union bureaucracy waged by the revolutionary wing of social democracy.⁸⁸ The international character of that struggle for the subordination of the unions to the revolutionary leadership of the party is shown by the fact that Lenin's views on Gompers and Legien

⁸³ Kautsky 1909d, pp. 680–1, emphasis in the original.

⁸⁴ Kautsky 1909d, p. 685.

⁸⁵ For a Trotskyist overview of the Debsian Socialist Party, see Cannon 1973a, pp. 245–310.

⁸⁶ Kautsky 1910a, pp. 132–7.

⁸⁷ Kautsky 1909c, pp. 253–4. See also Generalkommission der Gewerkschaften (*Korrespondenzblatt*) 1909 and Kautsky's response, Kautsky 1910e.

⁸⁸ Kautsky 1901; 1906b.

were virtually identical to Kautsky's.⁸⁹ As late as 31 January 1911, we find Lenin addressing him a letter asking for an article, to be published by the legal Russian Marxist journal *Mysl*, against the neutrality of the trade unions vis-à-vis the party⁹⁰ – a position Kautsky had criticised in his review of Legien's brochure *The German Trade-Union Movement*.⁹¹

Kautsky's attitude towards the labour-party tactic

At the October 1908 meeting of the International Socialist Bureau, Lenin criticised Kautsky's resolution supporting the affiliation of the British Labour Party to the Second International. Lenin agreed with the admission of the Labour Party, but, since it was not a socialist organisation pursuing a class policy fully independent of the bourgeoisie, he proposed an amendment to Kautsky's resolution describing it as 'the first step on the part of the really proletarian organisations of Britain towards a conscious class policy and towards a *socialist workers' party*'. The rectification of the sectarian errors of the Social-Democratic Federation could not be done by giving 'even a shadow of encouragement to *other, undoubted and not less important* errors of the British opportunists who lead the so-called Independent Labour Party'.⁹² Though, at that time, Lenin described the incident as just 'a slight awkwardness in Kautsky's resolution', it is retrospectively significant because of Kautsky's later political evolution, and also because his last significant text on the American labour movement was a 1909 polemical article against Karl Radek on the perspectives for the formation of a labour party in Great Britain and the US, and the attitude Marxists should adopt towards it. As in many of Kautsky's works, the brilliant historical analysis is marred by its rather equivocal political conclusions, leading in practice to an adaptation to the reformist union and party bureaucracy.

Kautsky distinguished between two models of historical development: the European continental type, as illustrated by German social democracy, and the Anglo-Saxon type, which could be best studied in England, but was also strongly developed in North America and Australia. The great difference

⁸⁹ On Gompers and the AFL, see Lenin 1970, pp. 56–7 and 100–4. On the AFL see Kerry 1980; 1998.

⁹⁰ Lenin 1964c, pp. 255–67.

⁹¹ Kautsky 1911a, pp. 418 ff.

⁹² Lenin 1963a, pp. 231–46, emphasis in the original.

between the Anglo-Saxon world and the European continent consisted in the fact that the political development of the latter took place under the flag of the French Revolution which commenced in 1789, whereas the bourgeois revolution in England was completed in 1688, that is, more than a whole century in advance. The bourgeois revolution in England was thus accomplished under less highly developed conditions, and could bring in its train no such a tremendous upheaval in the material and spiritual life of society as the French Revolution. The subsequent political advances made by the rising classes in England since 1688 usually took the form of isolated struggles for one particular object. The revolutionary classes were far more intent than the continentals in their actions, but held aloof from revolutionary ideas. Their aims concerned, not society as a whole, but only single issues. The revolutionary classes of the European continent, whose ideas were influenced by the French Revolution, were, on the contrary, far more prone to consider society as a totality and thus to strive to change it as a whole. Consequently, they were more ready than the English to look to the struggle for political rights as a means of attaining the social revolution.

In continental Europe, Kautsky continued, the political organisation of the proletariat – a mass party with a Marxist programme – had developed before the trade-union organisations; whereas, in the Anglo Saxon countries (in England after the decline of Chartism), the whole attention of the working masses was centred on the trade-union movement, and a separate political party seemed quite superfluous since no obstacle hindered their political activity. Under these conditions, it was only possible to form a separate mass working-class party by amalgamating the trade unions into a common political organisation, as a transitional stage towards the creation of a revolutionary workers' party with a definite Marxist programme. Kautsky hoped that the American Federation of Labor would be able to fulfil that role in the United States.⁹³

From revolutionary Marxism to centrism

In his extraordinarily insightful 1906 booklet *Results and Prospects*, Leon Trotsky wrote:

⁹³ Kautsky 1909a, pp. 316–28.

The function of the socialist parties was and is to revolutionize the consciousness of the working class, just as the development of capitalism revolutionized social relations. But the work of agitation and organization among the ranks of the proletariat has an internal inertia. The European Socialist Parties, particularly the largest of them, the German Social-Democratic Party, have developed their conservatism in proportion as the great masses have embraced socialism and the more these masses have become organized and disciplined. As a consequence of this, Social Democracy as an organization embodying the political experience of the proletariat may at a certain moment become a direct obstacle to the open conflict between the workers and bourgeois reaction. In other words, the propagandist-socialist conservatism of the proletarian parties may at a certain moment hold back the direct struggle of the proletariat for power.⁹⁴

Unfortunately, that prophecy proved to be correct and was incarnated, so to speak, in the person of the old Kautsky.

Kautsky's polemic with the union bureaucrats in November 1909 over Gompers's tour of Europe was the last flare of the fire that the 1905 Russian Revolution had kindled in him. He had warned against the growing bureaucratisation of the party apparatus as far back as the September 1906 Mannheim Congress of the SPD.⁹⁵ In a letter to Hugo Haase dated 14 February 1909, and written against the background of the SPD executive's opposition to the publication of his book *The Road to Power*, Kautsky wrote:

What most depresses me of the entire affair is the weakness of August [Bebel], which should surely be attributed to his poor health. He even upbraided me for my review of Cunow's book in *Vorwärts*, which he considered too revolutionary!⁹⁶ The word revolution seems to cause him direct physical discomfort. In his obituary of Natalie Liebknecht he speaks about the 'years of the movement' rather than the 'revolutionary years'. The situation today is such, that the most powerful Social-Democratic party of the world has the most servile executive of the world. August has lost all

⁹⁴ Trotsky 1906, Chapter 9 (Marxist Internet Archive edition).

⁹⁵ Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands 1906, p. 257. (A partial English translation is available at the MIA as 'On Socialism and Trade Unionism' [November 1906]).

⁹⁶ Kautsky 1909e; a review of Heinrich Cunow's forgotten Marxist classic on the French Revolution, first published in 1909 as *Die revolutionäre Zeitungsliteratur Frankreichs während der Jahre 1789 bis 1794*, Berlin: Buchhandlung Vorwärts, and reissued in 1912 as: *Die Parteien der grossen französischen Revolution und ihre Presse*, 2. erw. Ausgabe. On Cunow's book see also the reviews by Franz Mehring 1909; 1913.

strength, and during the last years he was the only politician with broad views among us. Singer has good instincts and works excellently with Bebel, but without him and even more against him he is not in a position to put in motion the indolent mass.⁹⁷

Both leaders died shortly afterwards: Paul Singer in 1911 and Bebel in 1913.

In a letter to Victor Adler dated 26 September 1909, Kautsky further revealed his pessimism at what he called the 'Überwuchern des Bürokratismus' that, beginning in the unions, had now extended to the party, and by turning its functionaries into mere administrators of a huge apparatus, killed in its cradle every bold initiative. Kautsky placed all his hopes on mass action that would infuse once again the necessary impetus and enthusiasm into the inert body of the trade-union and party bureaucracy.⁹⁸ In fact, the next few years would witness the growing stranglehold of the reformist bureaucracy over the unions and the SPD. On the eve of the First World War, control of the party executive had effectively passed into the hands of Friedrich Ebert, who later came to be known as 'the Stalin of social democracy'.

Kautsky's own decline set in a few months later, when he began to accommodate to the reformist pressures of the labour bureaucracy and aristocracy. In 1909, he had written in the last chapter of *The Road to Power*, called 'A New Century of Revolutions':

The immediate task of the proletariat in Germany is to strive energetically for democracy in the Empire as well as in the different states, notably Prussia and Saxony. From an international point of view, its most pressing task is the struggle against imperialism and militarism. No less evident that the task itself are the means at our disposal for carrying it out. To those employed so far should be added the *general strike*, which we have adopted theoretically since the beginning of the 1890s and whose efficacy under favourable circumstances has been proved several times.⁹⁹

Yet, a year later, he refused to publish in the pages of *Die Neue Zeit* an article by Luxemburg calling for the use of the general strike in order to achieve universal suffrage in Prussia, and raising the slogan of the republic as a transitional demand in order to turn the issue of electoral reform into a channel

⁹⁷ Reproduced in Ratz 1967, pp. 432–77.

⁹⁸ Adler (ed.) 1954, pp. 500–2.

⁹⁹ Kautsky 1972, p. 110, emphasis in the original.

for revolutionary action.¹⁰⁰ This resulted in a break of personal relations with Luxemburg and, a year later, with Mehring (who was removed from the editorial board of *Die Neue Zeit* in 1912), as well as in a series of polemics in the columns of *Die Neue Zeit* with Luxemburg, Radek, Pannekoek and Lensch, which marked the beginning of the separation between the centre and the left wing of the SPD and the Second International.

In the course of this debate, Kautsky assumed the role of leading theoretician of the SPD centrists and developed his infamous 'attrition strategy [*Ermattungsstrategie*]' of struggle against capitalism. Ironically, the former leader of the struggle against revisionism, which began with an article against Bernstein by the maverick British left-wing socialist Belfort Bax called 'Our German Fabian Convert', now found himself delivering long tirades recommending the emulation of the strategy of Fabius Cunctator.¹⁰¹ When, in the course of the polemic, Kautsky significantly began to refer to the members of the revolutionary left wing of the SPD as 'our Russians', Luxemburg called his attention to the fact that a few years earlier he too had been called 'a Russian' and a preacher of 'revolutionary romanticism', and that his present politics were 'nothing but parliamentarism'.¹⁰²

As regards the central question of modern politics, imperialism, Kautsky now began to argue that the conflict of interest among the imperialist powers was not an economic necessity, and to defend the delusional policy of fighting the arms race through the advocacy of international agreements to limit armaments in the framework of imperialist society.¹⁰³ As Radek put it, Kautsky was forced to revise his earlier theory that militarism was an inevitable outgrowth of imperialism, not because imperialism had changed its nature, but because his Fabian strategy of 'wearing out the enemy' could not be sustained by his former analysis.¹⁰⁴

At the outbreak of the controversy between the left and centre factions of the SPD, most of the Russian revolutionary leaders failed to take Luxemburg's side. In July 1910, Trotsky wrote to Kautsky that no one in the Russian party,

¹⁰⁰ Luxemburg 1972g, pp. 148–59.

¹⁰¹ Kautsky 1910c; Luxemburg 1972c; Kautsky 1910d; Luxemburg 1972e.

¹⁰² Kautsky 1913; Luxemburg 1973.

¹⁰³ Ratz 1966, pp. 197–227; Petit 1969, pp. 325–37.

¹⁰⁴ Radek, 'Unser Kampf gegen den Imperialismus' (*Die Neue Zeit*, May 1912) and 'Wege und Mittel im Kampfe gegen den Imperialismus' (*Bremer Bürger-Zeitung*, 1912), in Radek 1921a, pp. 156–207. Radek was following Luxemburg's lead: see Kautsky 1911c and Luxemburg 1972f.

'not even among the Bolsheviks', dared to side with Luxemburg, and that he admired her 'noble impatience' but considered it absurd 'to raise it to a leading principle for the party'.¹⁰⁵ The most insightful comment was Parvus's, who pointed out to Kautsky that 'the whole affair is an amusingly faithful copy of the discussion between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks before the Russian Revolution'.¹⁰⁶ But Lenin had a number of theoretical divergences with Luxemburg and her Polish organisation (on the national question¹⁰⁷ and organisational issues,¹⁰⁸ as well as on her criticism of Marx's expanded reproduction schemes, on which she based her theory of imperialism¹⁰⁹), and, above all, was much less acquainted with the SPD's advanced state of bureaucratisation. His first serious clashes with the centrist leadership of the Second International came in 1912 over Russian affairs, when Lenin opposed the unification initiatives of the ISB after the definitive scission between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.¹¹⁰ A meeting was finally held in Brussels in July 1914, at which the Bolsheviks rejected all unprincipled prospects of unity between the two politically irreconcilable trends.¹¹¹ But, as far as German and international politics were concerned, Lenin continued to consider himself a faithful disciple of Kautsky right up to the outbreak of the First World War.

When the SPD betrayed the most elementary principles of proletarian internationalism and the traditional slogan that had always formed the basis of its agitation ('to this system, not one man and not one penny'), by voting for war credits in the Reichstag on 4 August 1914, Lenin drastically reversed his position and recognised the correctness of Luxemburg's criticism of Kautsky's centrism. In the section of his major work *The State and Revolution* dealing with Kautsky's controversy with Pannekoek on the mass political strike Lenin wrote:

In opposing Kautsky, Pannekoek came out as one of the representatives of the 'Left radical' trend which included Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Radek, and others. Advocating revolutionary tactics, they were united in the conviction

¹⁰⁵ Trotsky to Kautsky, 21 July 1910. Kautsky Archive, IISG (International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam). Quoted in Nettl 1966, Vol. I, p. 433.

¹⁰⁶ Parvus to Kautsky, 10 June 1910. Kautsky Archive, IISG (International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam). Quoted in Donald 1993, pp. 183–4.

¹⁰⁷ Luxemburg 1976; Lenin 1950.

¹⁰⁸ Luxemburg 1970, pp. 112–30.

¹⁰⁹ Luxemburg 1964; Lenin 2000, pp. 225–38. Lenin recommended three criticisms of Luxemburg's book: Eckstein 1913; Pannekoek 1913; and Bauer 1986.

¹¹⁰ Lenin 1963c; 1963d. See also Haupt 1966.

¹¹¹ Woods 1999, pp. 417–18.

that Kautsky was going over to the 'Centre,' which wavered in an unprincipled manner between Marxism and opportunism. This view was proved perfectly correct by the war, when this 'Centrist' (wrongly called Marxist) trend, or Kautskyism, revealed itself in all its repulsive wretchedness.¹¹²

Bolshevism and the democratic counterrevolution

The First World War eventually led to the outbreak of a new revolution in Russia in February 1917, whose actual course did not fit with the traditional schemata of Bolshevism. Though the revolution was accomplished by a union of the workers and peasants, it did not lead to the establishment of a 'democratic dictatorship' but to a régime of dual power in which a bourgeois government was confronted with the not yet fully realised sovereignty of workers' and soldiers' soviets led by the Social Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks. Lenin accordingly rearmed the party with his 1917 'April Theses', setting before it the perspective of seizing power and establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat in the immediate future – as Trotsky, then an exile in the United States, demanded from far-away New York. After this virtual endorsement of the theory of permanent revolution by Lenin, Trotsky and the other members of the Inter-District organisation joined the Bolshevik Party and played a leading role in the October Revolution.

The 'pacifist' phrases of the white-supremacist American President Woodrow Wilson in early 1917 found ardent supporters in Kautsky and the other leaders of the German social democracy's 'centre' faction, Hugo Haase and George Ledebour,¹¹³ who, in fact, pioneered the post-World War I role of European social democracy as 'the political agency of American capitalism'.¹¹⁴ Confronted with the Bolshevik Revolution, Kautsky renounced his former views and, condemning the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly by the soviets, bowed to the fetishes of bourgeois parliamentarism and joined the camp of the democratic counterrevolution sponsored by imperialism. Kautsky's closest companion-in-arms in the USPD (Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands: Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany) was Eduard Bernstein, who had never renounced his revisionist views.

¹¹² For a selection of documents from this debate see Grunenberg (ed.) 1970.

¹¹³ Luxemburg 1974.

¹¹⁴ Trotsky 1971a, p. 23.

Kautsky wrote three books in defence of the democratic counterrevolution, the first two of which were answered by Lenin and Trotsky. Lenin's *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* (1918) was a reply to Kautsky's *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat* (1918), and Trotsky's *Terrorism and Communism: A Reply to Karl Kautsky* (1920) was written in response to Kautsky's *Terrorism and Communism: A Contribution to the Natural History of Revolution* (1919). In 1921, Kautsky wrote a third book against the Bolshevik Revolution *From Democracy to State Slavery: A Discussion with Trotsky*, which was never translated to English.¹¹⁵ In his 1922 brochure, *The Paths of the Russian Revolution*, Radek quoted lengthy portions from Kautsky 1907 study 'The Driving Forces of the Russian Revolution and Its Prospects', showing that they flatly contradicted his later assertions that the Russian Revolution should have limited itself to carrying out purely bourgeois tasks, adding:

This honest fellow here seeks to create the impression that he had been a Menshevik, so to speak, from birth. But as the quotations above show, he was not only solidly with the Bolsheviks on the *decisive question of the understanding of the role of the bourgeoisie in the Russian Revolution*, but where he departed from the Bolsheviks *he went even further than they did by estimating as possible the passing over of the Russian Revolution to a direct struggle for Socialism*. The respected Karl Kautsky can plead in his defence that his present ideas are the echo of Martov's, and that in 1905–6 he had echoed Rosa Luxemburg. Kautsky's arguments of 1906 were the reflection of a tendency which had its representatives as the time of the first revolution in Trotsky, Parvus and Rosa Luxemburg, a tendency which, as we have said, we outside both of the factions of Russian Social Democracy. The representatives of this tendency pointed out that even if the peasantry represented a great revolutionary force which the working class must by all means attempt to develop and on whom it had to rely, it was not capable of carrying out an independent policy because of its social atomization, its dispersion, and the low level of its development. Whereas Lenin and the Bolsheviks *talked about the dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry*, the above-mentioned Marxists laid down the formula of *the dictatorship of the proletariat supported by the peasantry*.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Kautsky 1921b.

¹¹⁶ Radek 1999, emphasis in the original.

In his no less brilliant 1919 work *Proletarian Dictatorship and Terrorism*, Radek accurately captured the revolutionaries' view of Kautsky at that time: 'While long rows of priests with swinging censers march in front of Kolchak's troops, and endeavour to break the courage of the peasants in the Red Army by holding aloft sacred images, Karl Kautsky holds up to the view of the proletariat of Russia and of Europe a picture of wonder-working democracy in one hand and a terrible picture of proletarian despotism in the other'.¹¹⁷ Evidently, Radek concluded, Kautsky had never assimilated the lessons of the 1871 Paris Commune, which was also an insurrection against the result of universal suffrage in France, since the National Assembly elected after the fall of Louis Napoleon included 400 Monarchists and 200 Republicans. The democratic counterrevolution would later be repeatedly employed by the bourgeoisie to confuse the revolutionary workers' leadership, for instance the inexperienced cadres of the Fourth International during the revolutionary period that opened up in Western Europe immediately after the Second World War.¹¹⁸

But Kautsky's inglorious ending in no way detracts from the value of the writings of his revolutionary period, of which 'The American Worker' is an outstanding example. As Trotsky wrote in his obituary: 'We remember Kautsky as our former teacher to whom we once owed a great deal, but who separated himself from the proletarian revolution and from whom, consequently, we had to separate ourselves'.¹¹⁹

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¹¹⁷ Radek 1921b, pp. 13–14. See also Lenin in Adler (ed.) 1983, pp. 7–19.

¹¹⁸ See Bornstein and Richardson 1986, pp. 160–208.

¹¹⁹ Trotsky 1973b, pp. 98–9.

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