



Second Edition

# Hegemony and Socialist Strategy

*Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe

\$18/£13/\$28CAN

PHRONESIS

## HEGEMONY AND SOCIALIST STRATEGY

SECOND EDITION

ERNESTO LACLAU and CHANTAL MOUFFE

Since its original publication fifteen years ago, this hugely influential book has been at the centre of much debate. The arguments and controversies it has aroused are, furthermore, far from abating: the disintegration of the Soviet bloc, the emergence of new social and political identities linked to the transformation of late capitalism, and the crisis of a left-wing project whose essentialist underpinnings have increasingly come under fire have, if anything, made more relevant than ever the theoretical perspective that the book proposes. Moreover the political project of 'radical and plural democracy' that it advocates provides a much-needed antidote to the attempts to formulate a Third Way capable of overcoming the classical opposition between Left and Right.

Updated with a new preface, this is a fundamental text for understanding the workings of hegemony and grasping the nature of contemporary social struggles and their significance for democratic theory.

**Ernesto Laclau** is Professor of Political Theory at the University of Essex. He is the author of *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, *Emancipation(s)*, *The Making of Political Identities* and, with Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*.

**Chantal Mouffe** is Professor of Political Theory at the Centre for the Study of Democracy at the University of Westminster. She is the author of, among other works, *The Return of the Political*, *The Dimensions of Radical Democracy*, *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt* and *The Democratic Paradox*.

ISBN 1-85984-330-1



9 781859 843307



VERSO

UK: 6 Meard Street, London W1F 0EG

USA: 180 Varick Street, New York NY 10014-4806

[www.versobooks.com](http://www.versobooks.com)

Cover design: the Senate

# Hegemony: the Genealogy of a Concept

We will start by tracing the *genealogy* of the concept of 'hegemony'. It should be stressed that this will not be the genealogy of a concept endowed from the beginning with full positivity. In fact, using somewhat freely an expression of Foucault, we could say that our aim is to establish the 'archaeology of a silence'. The concept of hegemony did not emerge to define a new type of relation in its specific identity, but to fill a hiatus that had opened in the chain of historical necessity. 'Hegemony' will allude to an absent totality, and to the diverse attempts at recomposition and rearticulation which, in overcoming this original absence, made it possible for struggles to be given a meaning and for historical forces to be endowed with full positivity. The contexts in which the concept appear will be those of a *fault* (in the geological sense), of a fissure that had to be filled up, of a contingency that had to be overcome. 'Hegemony' will be not the majestic unfolding of an identity but the response to a crisis.

Even in its humble origins in Russian Social Democracy, where it is called upon to cover a limited area of political effects, the concept of 'hegemony' already alludes to a kind of *contingent* intervention required by the crisis or collapse of what would have been a 'normal' historical development. Later, with Leninism, it is a keystone in the new form of political calculation required by the contingent 'concrete situations' in which the class struggle occurs in the age of imperialism. Finally, with Gramsci, the term acquires a new type of centrality that transcends its tactical or strategic uses: 'hegemony' becomes the key concept in understanding the very unity existing in a concrete social formation. Each of these extensions of the term, however, was accompanied by an expansion of what we could provisionally call a 'logic of the contingent'. In its turn, this expression stemmed from the fracture, and withdrawal to the explanatory horizon of the social, of the category of 'historical necessity' which

had been the cornerstone of Second International Marxism. The alternatives within this advancing crisis — and the different responses to it, of which the theory of hegemony is but one — form the object of our study.

### The Dilemmas of Rosa Luxemburg

Let us avoid any temptation to go back to the 'origins'. Let us simply pierce a moment in time and try to detect the presence of that void which the logic of hegemony will attempt to fill. This arbitrary beginning, projected in a variety of directions, will offer us, if not the sense of a trajectory, at least the dimensions of a crisis. It is in the multiple, meandering reflections in the broken mirror of 'historical necessity' that a new logic of the social begins to insinuate itself, one that will only manage to think itself by questioning the very literality of the terms it articulates.

In 1906 Rosa Luxemburg published *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*. A brief analysis of this text — which already presents all the ambiguities and critical areas important to our theme — will provide us with an initial point of reference. Rosa Luxemburg deals with a specific theme: the efficacy and significance of the mass strike as a political tool. But for her this implies consideration of two vital problems for the socialist cause: the unity of the working class and the path to revolution in Europe. Mass strike, the dominant form of struggle in the first Russian revolution, is dealt with in its specific mechanisms as well as in its possible projections for the workers' struggle in Germany. The theses of Rosa Luxemburg are well known: while debate concerning the efficacy of the mass strike in Germany had centred almost exclusively on the political strike, the Russian experience had demonstrated an interaction and a mutual and constant enrichment between the political and economic dimensions of the mass strike. In the repressive context of the Tsarist state, no movement for partial demands could remain confined within itself: it was inevitably transformed into an example and symbol of resistance, thus fuelling and giving birth to other movements. These emerged at unpreconceived points and tended to expand and generalize in unforeseeable forms, so that they were beyond the capacity of regulation and organization of any political or trade union leadership. This is the meaning of Luxemburg's 'spontaneism'. The unity between the economic and the political struggle — that is to say, the very unity of the working class — is a

consequence of this movement of feedback and interaction. But this movement in turn is nothing other than the process of revolution.

If we move from Russia to Germany, Rosa Luxemburg argues, the situation becomes very different. The dominant trend is the fragmentation among diverse categories of workers, between the different demands of various movements, between economic struggle and political struggle. 'Only in the sultry air of the period of revolution can any partial little conflict between labour and capital grow into a general explosion. In Germany the most violent, most brutal collisions between the workers and the employers take place every day without the struggle over-leaping the bound of the individual factories . . . None of these cases . . . changes suddenly into a common class action. And when they grow into isolated mass strikes which have without question a political colouring, they do not bring about a general storm.'<sup>1</sup> This isolation and fragmentation is not a contingent event: it is a structural effect of the capitalist state, which is only overcome in a revolutionary atmosphere. 'As a matter of fact the separation of the political and the economic struggle and the independence of each is nothing but an artificial product of the parliamentary period, even if historically determined. On the one hand, in the peaceful, "normal" course of bourgeois society the economic struggle is split into a multitude of individual struggles in every undertaking and dissolved in every branch of production. On the other hand, the political struggle is not directed by the masses themselves in a direct action, but in correspondence with the form of the bourgeois State, in a representative fashion, by the presence of legislative representation.'<sup>2</sup>

In these conditions and given that the revolutionary outbreaks in Russia could be explained by factors such as the comparative backwardness of the country, the absence of political liberties, or the poverty of the Russian proletariat — were not the perspectives for revolution in the West postponed *sine die*? Here Rosa Luxemburg's response becomes hesitant and less convincing as it assumes a characteristic course: namely, an attempt to minimize the differences between the Russian and the German proletariat, showing the areas of poverty and the absence of organization in various sectors of the German working class, as well as the presence of inverse phenomena in the most advanced sectors of the Russian proletariat. But what of those pockets of backwardness in Germany? Were they not residual sectors which would be swept away by capitalist expansion? And in that case, what guaranteed the emergence of a revolutionary situation? The answer to *our* question — Rosa Luxemburg does not at

any point formulate it in this text — comes to us abruptly and unequivocally a few pages later: '(The social democrats) must now and always hasten the development of things and endeavour to accelerate events. This they cannot do, however, by suddenly issuing the "slogan" for a mass strike at random at any moment, but first and foremost, by making clear to the widest layers of the proletariat the *inevitable advent* of this revolutionary period, the inner *social factors* making for it and the *political consequences* of it.'<sup>3</sup> Thus, the 'necessary laws of capitalist development' establish themselves as a guarantee for the future revolutionary situation in Germany. Everything is now clear: as there were no more bourgeois-democratic changes to be achieved in Germany (*sic*), the coming of a revolutionary situation could only be resolved in a socialist direction; the Russian proletariat — struggling against absolutism, but in a historical context dominated by the maturity of world capitalism which prevented it from stabilizing its own struggles in a bourgeois stage — was the vanguard of the European proletariat and pointed out to the German working class its own future. The problem of the differences between East and West, so important in the strategic debates of European socialism from Bernstein to Gramsci, was here resolved by being discarded.<sup>4</sup>

Let us analyse the various moments of this remarkable sequence. Concerning the constitutive mechanism of class unity, Rosa Luxemburg's position is clear: in capitalist society, the working class is necessarily fragmented and the recomposition of its unity only occurs through the very process of revolution. Yet the *form* of this revolutionary recomposition consists of a specific mechanism which has little to do with any mechanistic explanation. It is here that spontaneism comes into play. One could think that the 'spontaneist' theory simply affirms the impossibility of *foreseeing* the direction of a revolutionary process, given the complexity and variety of forms which it adopts. Nevertheless, this explanation is insufficient. For what is at stake is not merely the complexity and diversity inherent in a dispersion of struggles — when these are seen from the point of view of an analyst or a political leader — but also the constitution of the *unity* of the revolutionary subject on the basis of this complexity and diversity. This alone shows us that in attempting to determine the meaning of Luxemburgist 'spontaneism', we must concentrate not only on the plurality of forms of struggle but also on the relations which they establish among themselves and on the unifying effects which follow from them. And here, the mechanism of unification is clear: in a revolutionary situation, it is impossible to *fix the literal sense*

of each isolated struggle, because each struggle overflows its own literality and comes to represent, in the consciousness of the masses, a simple moment of a more global struggle against the system. And so it is that while in a period of stability the class consciousness of the worker — as a global consciousness constituted around his 'historical interests' — is 'latent' and 'theoretical', in a revolutionary situation it becomes 'active' and 'practical'. Thus, in a revolutionary situation the *meaning* of every mobilization appears, so to speak, as split: aside from its specific literal demands, each mobilization represents the revolutionary process as a whole; and these totalizing effects are visible in the overdetermination of some struggles by others. This is, however, nothing other than the defining characteristic of the symbol: the overflowing of the signifier by the signified.<sup>5</sup> *The unity of the class is therefore a symbolic unity*. Undoubtedly this is the highest point in Luxemburg's analysis, one which establishes the maximum distance from the orthodox theoreticians of the Second International (for whom class unity is simply laid down by the laws of the economic base). Although in many other analyses of the period a role is given to the contingent — exceeding the moment of 'structural' theorization — few texts advance as much as Rosa Luxemburg's in determining the specific mechanisms of this contingency and in recognizing the extent of its practical effects.<sup>6</sup>

Now, on the one hand, the analysis of Rosa Luxemburg has multiplied the points of antagonism and the forms of struggle — which we will from now on call the *subject positions* — up to the point of exploding all capacity for control or planning of these struggles by a trade-union or political leadership; on the other hand, it has proposed symbolic overdetermination as a concrete mechanism for the unification of these struggles. Here, however, the problems begin, since for Rosa Luxemburg this process of overdetermination constitutes a very precise unity: a *class unity*. Yet there is nothing in the theory of spontaneism which logically supports her conclusion. On the contrary, the very logic of spontaneism seems to imply that the resulting type of unitary subject should remain largely indeterminate. In the case of the Tsarist state, if the condition of overdetermination of the points of antagonism and the diverse struggles is a repressive political context, why cannot the class limits be surpassed and lead to the construction of, for example, partially unified subjects whose fundamental determination is popular or democratic? Even in Rosa Luxemburg's text — notwithstanding the dogmatic rigidity of the author, for whom every subject has to be a class subject — the surpassing of classist categories appears at a

number of points. 'Throughout the whole of the spring of 1905 and into the middle of summer there fermented throughout the whole empire an uninterrupted economic strike of almost the entire proletariat against capital — a struggle which on the one hand caught all the petty-bourgeois and liberal professions, and on the other hand penetrated to the domestic servants, the minor police officials and even to the stratum of the lumpen proletariat, and simultaneously surged from the towns to the country districts and even knocked at the iron gates of the military barracks.'<sup>7</sup>

Let us be clear about the meaning of our question: if the unity of the working class were an infrastructural datum constituted *outside* the process of revolutionary overdetermination, the question concerning the class character of the revolutionary subject would not arise. Indeed, both political and economic struggle would be symmetrical expressions of a class subject constituted prior to the struggles themselves. But if the unity *is* this process of overdetermination, an independent explanation has to be offered as to why there should be a necessary overlap between political subjectivity and class positions. Although Rosa Luxemburg does not offer such an explanation — in fact, she does not even perceive the problem — the background of her thought makes clear what this would have been: namely, an affirmation of the necessary character of the objective laws of capitalist development, which lead to an increasing proletarianization of the middle sectors and the peasantry and, thus, to a straightforward confrontation between bourgeoisie and proletariat. Consequently the innovatory effects of the logic of spontaneism appear to be strictly limited from the beginning.<sup>8</sup>

The effects are so limited, no doubt, because the area in which they operate is extremely circumscribed. But also because, in a second and more important sense, the logic of spontaneism and the logic of necessity do not converge as two distinct and positive principles to explain certain historical situations, but function instead as antithetical logics which only interact with each other through the reciprocal limitation of their effects. Let us carefully examine the point where they diverge. The logic of spontaneism is a logic of the symbol inasmuch as it operates precisely through the disruption of every literal meaning. The logic of necessity is a logic of the literal: it operates through fixations which, precisely because they are necessary, establish a meaning that eliminates any contingent variation. In this case, however, the relation between the two logics is a relation of frontiers, which can expand in one or another direction but never overcome the irreducible dualism introduced into the analysis.

In reality, we here witness the emergence of a *double void*. Seen from the category of necessity, the duality of logics merges with the determinable/indeterminable opposition: that is to say, it only points to the operational limits of that category. But the same thing occurs from the point of view of spontaneism: the field of 'historical necessity' presents itself as a limit to the working of the symbolic. The *limits* are, in actual fact, *limitations*. If the specificity of this limitation of effects is not immediately evident, this is because it is thought of as a confluence of two positive and different explanatory principles, each valid in its own area, and not as what each of them is: the purely negative reverse of the other. The double void created by dualism hereby becomes invisible. However, to make a void invisible is not the same as to fill it up.

Before we examine the changing forms of this double void, we may for a moment place ourselves within it and practise the only game it allows us: that is, to move the frontiers separating the two opposed logics. If we broaden the area corresponding to historical necessity, the result is a well-known alternative: either capitalism leads through its necessary laws to proletarianization and crisis; or else these necessary laws do not function as expected, in which case, following the very logic of Luxemburgist discourse, the fragmentation between different subject positions ceases to be an 'artificial product' of the capitalist state and becomes a permanent reality. It is the zero-sum game intrinsic to all economic and reductionist conceptions. If, on the contrary, we move the boundary in the opposite direction, to the point where the class nature of political subjects loses its necessary character, the spectacle that appears before our eyes is not at all imaginary: it is the original forms of overdetermination assumed by social struggles in the Third World, with the construction of political identities having little to do with strict class boundaries; it is the rise of fascism, which would brutally dispel the illusion of the necessary character of certain class articulations; it is the new forms of struggle in the advanced capitalist countries, where during the last few decades we have witnessed the constant emergence of new forms of political subjectivity cutting across the categories of the social and economic structure. The concept of 'hegemony' will emerge precisely in a context dominated by the experience of fragmentation and by the indeterminacy of the articulations between different struggles and subject positions. It will offer a socialist answer in a politico-discursive universe that has witnessed a withdrawal of the category of 'necessity' to the horizon of the social. Faced with attempts to tackle the crisis of an essentialist

monism through a proliferation of dualisms — free-will/determinism; science/ethics; individual/collectivity; causality/teleology — the theory of hegemony will ground its response on a displacement of the terrain which made possible the monist/dualist alternative.

One final point before leaving Rosa Luxemburg. The limitation of effects which the ‘necessary laws’ produce in her discourse also functions in another important direction: as a limitation of the political conclusions capable of being derived from the ‘observable tendencies’ in advanced capitalism. The role of theory is not to elaborate intellectually the observable tendencies of fragmentation and dispersion, but to ensure that such tendencies have a transitory character. There is a split between ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ which is a clear symptom of a crisis. This crisis — to which the emergence of Marxist ‘orthodoxy’ represents only one answer — is the starting-point of our analysis. Yet it requires that we place ourselves at a point prior to this beginning, in order to identify the paradigm that entered into crisis. For this we can refer to a document of exceptional clarity and systematicity: Kautsky’s 1892 commentary to the Erfurt Programme, the seminal manifesto of German Social Democracy.<sup>9</sup>

### Crisis, Degree Zero

*The Class Struggle* is a typical Kautskian text which puts forward an indissociable unity of theory, history and strategy.<sup>10</sup> From our present-day perspective, of course, it appears extremely naïve and simplistic. Yet we must inquire into the various dimensions of this simplicity, for they will permit us to understand both the structural characteristics of the paradigm and the reasons that led to its crisis at the turn of the century.

The paradigm is simple, in a primary and literal sense that Kautsky quite explicitly presents a theory of the increasing *simplification* of the social structure and the antagonisms within it. Capitalist society advances towards an increasing concentration of property and wealth in the hands of a few enterprises; and a rapid proletarianization of the most diverse social strata and occupational categories is combined with a growing impoverishment of the working class. This impoverishment, and the necessary laws of capitalist development that are at its origin, hinder a real autonomization of spheres and functions within the working class: the economic struggle can have only modest and precarious successes, and this leads to a *de facto* subordination of trade-union to party organization, which alone can

substantially modify the position of the proletariat through the conquest of political power. The structural moments or instances of capitalist society also lack any form of relative autonomy. The state, for example, is presented in terms of the most crass instrumentalism. Thus, the simplicity of the Kautskian paradigm consists, first of all, in a simplification of the system of structural differences constitutive of capitalist society.

Yet the Kautskian paradigm is also simple in a second and less frequently mentioned sense, which is of crucial importance for our analysis. Here, the point is not so much that the paradigm reduces the number of pertinent structural differences, but that it fixes them through the attribution to each of a *single meaning*, understood as a precise location within a totality. In the first sense, Kautsky’s analysis was simply economic and reductionist; but if this were the only problem, the corrective would merely have to introduce the ‘relative autonomies’ of the political and the ideological, and render the analysis more complex through the multiplication of instances within a topography of the social. *Yet each one of these multiplied instances or structural moments would have an identity as fixed and singular as the instances of the Kautskian paradigm.*

In order to illustrate this *unicity of meaning*, let us examine how Kautsky explains the relationship between economic and political struggle: ‘Occasionally someone has attempted to oppose the political struggle to the economic, and declared that the proletariat should give its exclusive attention to one or the other. The fact is that the two cannot be separated. The economic struggle demands political rights and these will not fall from heaven. To secure and maintain them the most vigorous political struggle is necessary. The political struggle is, in the last analysis, an economic struggle.’<sup>11</sup> Rosa Luxemburg also affirmed the unity of the two types of struggle, but she began from an *initial diversity*, and unity was a *unification*, the result of an overdetermination of discrete elements without any forms of fixed, a priori articulation. For Kautsky, however, unity is the starting-point: the working class struggles in the field of politics by virtue of an economic calculation. It is possible to pass from one struggle to the other through a purely logical transition. In the case of Rosa Luxemburg, each struggle had more than one meaning — as we have seen, it was reduplicated in a second symbolic dimension. Nor was its meaning fixed: for it depended upon variable articulations which, from her spontaneist perspective repelled any a priori determination (within the limits we have signalled). Kautsky, on the other hand, simplified the meaning of every

social antagonism or element by reducing it to a specific structural location, already fixed by the logic of the capitalist mode of production. The history of capitalism set out in *The Class Struggle* consists of *pure relations of interiority*. We can pass from working class to capitalists, from the economic sphere to the political sphere, from manufacture to monopoly capitalism, without having to depart for one instant from the internal rationality and intelligibility of a closed paradigm. Capitalism is, no doubt, presented to us as acting upon an external social reality, yet the latter simply dissolves upon entering into contact with the former. Capitalism changes, yet this change is nothing more than the unfolding of its endogenous tendencies and contradictions. Here the logic of necessity is not limited by anything: this is what makes *The Class Struggle* a pre-crisis text.

Finally, simplicity is present in a third dimension — that which refers to the role of theory itself. If this early Kautskian text is compared with others belonging to an earlier or later Marxist tradition, we find that it contains a rather surprising feature: it presents itself not as an intervention to unravel the underlying sense of history, but as the systematization and generalization of a transparent experience which is there for all to see. As there is no social hieroglyph to decode, there is a perfect correspondence between theory and the practices of the workers movement. With regard to the constitution of class unity, Adam Przeworski has pointed out the peculiarity of Kautsky's text: whereas Marx, from the time of the *Poverty of Philosophy*, presented the unity of the economic insertion and political organization of the working class as an unfinished process — this was the hiatus which the distinction between 'class in itself' and 'class for itself' tried to fill — Kautsky argues as if the working class has already completed the formation of its unity. 'It seems that Kautsky believed that by 1890 the formation of the proletariat into a class was a *fait accompli*; it was already formed as a class and would remain so in the future. The organized proletariat had nothing left to do but to pursue its historical mission, and the party could only participate in its realization.'<sup>12</sup> Similarly, when Kautsky refers to growing proletarianization and impoverishment, to the inevitable crises of capitalism, or to the necessary advent of socialism, he seems to be speaking not of potential tendencies revealed by analysis, but of empirically observable realities in the first two cases, and of a short-term transition in the third. Despite the fact that necessity is the dominant category in his discourse, its function is not to guarantee a meaning beyond experience, but to systematize experience itself.

Now, although the combination of elements underlying this optimism and simplicity is presented as part of a universal process of class constitution, it merely represented the crowning of the very specific historical formation of the *German* working class. Firstly, the political autonomy of the German working class was the result of two failures: that of the German bourgeoisie, after 1849, to set itself up as the hegemonic force of a liberal-democratic movement; and that of the Lassalleans' corporatist attempt to integrate the working class into the Bismarckian state. Secondly, the great depression of 1873–96, and the accompanying economic insecurity which affected all social strata, nurtured a general optimism about the imminent collapse of capitalism and the advent of proletarian revolution. Thirdly, the working class had a low degree of structural complexity: the trade unions were incipient and subordinated to the party both politically and financially; and in the context of the twenty-year depression, the prospects for an improvement in the workers' condition through trade-union activity seemed extremely limited. Only with difficulty was the General Commission of the German trade unions, established in 1890, able to impose its hegemony over the workers movement, amid the resistance of local trade union powers and the overall scepticism of Social Democracy.<sup>13</sup>

Under these conditions, the unity and autonomy of the working class, and the collapse of the capitalist system, virtually appeared as facts of experience. These were the reading parameters which gave the Kautskian discourse its acceptability. In reality, however, the situation was strictly German — or, at most, typical of certain European countries where the liberal bourgeoisie was weak — and certainly did not correspond to those processes of working-class formation in countries with a strong liberal (England) or democratic-Jacobin tradition (France), or where ethnic and religious identities predominated over those of class (the United States). But since, in the Marxist Vulgate, history advanced towards an ever greater simplification of social antagonisms, the extreme isolation and confrontation course of the German workers movement would acquire the prestige of a paradigm towards which other national situations had to converge and in relation to which they were merely inadequate approximations.<sup>14</sup>

The end of the depression brought the beginning of the crisis of this paradigm. The transition to 'organized capitalism', and the ensuing boom that lasted until 1914, made uncertain the prospect of a 'general crisis of capitalism'. Under the new conditions, a wave of

successful trade union economic struggles enabled the workers to consolidate their organizational power and influence within Social Democracy. But at this point, a steady tension began to assert itself between the trade unions and the political leadership within the party, so that the unity and socialist determination of the working class became increasingly problematic. In all areas of society, an *autonomization of spheres* was taking place — which implied that any type of unity could only be attained through unstable and complex forms of rearticulation. From this new perspective, a serious question-mark appeared over the seemingly logical and simple sequence of the various structural moments of the 1892 Kautskian paradigm. And as the relationship between theory and programme was one of total implication, the political crisis was reduplicated in a theoretical one. In 1898 Thomas Masaryk coined an expression that soon became popular: the ‘crisis of Marxism’.

This crisis, which served as the background to all Marxist debates from the turn of the century until the war, seems to have been dominated by two basic moments: the new awareness of the opacity of the social, of the complexities and resistances of an increasingly organized capitalism; and the fragmentation of the different positions of social agents which, according to the classical paradigm, should have been united.<sup>15</sup> In a famous passage of a letter to Lagardelle, Antonio Labriola stated at the beginning of the revisionism debate: ‘Truly, behind all this rumour of controversy, there is a serious and essential problem: the ardent, lively and precocious hopes of some years ago — those expectations of over-precise details and contours — are now running up against the most complex resistance of economic relations and the most intricate meshing of the political world.’<sup>16</sup>

It would be wrong to see this as a merely transitory crisis; on the contrary, Marxism finally lost its innocence at that time. In so far as the paradigmatic sequence of its categories was subjected to the ‘structural pressure’ of increasingly atypical situations, it became ever more difficult to reduce social relations to structural moments internal to those categories. A proliferation of caesurae and discontinuities start to break down the unity of a discourse that considered itself profoundly monist. From then on, the problem of Marxism has been *to think those discontinuities* and, at the same time, to find *forms reconstituting* the unity of scattered and heterogeneous elements. The transitions between different structural moments have lost their originary logical transparency and reveal an opacity pertaining to contingent and laboriously constructed relations. The

specificity of the different responses to the crisis of this paradigm resides in the way of conceiving this relational moment — whose importance increases to the extent that its nature becomes less evident. This is what we must now analyse.

### The First Response to the Crisis: the Formation of Marxist Orthodoxy

Marxist orthodoxy, as it is constituted in Kautsky and Plekhanov, is not a simple continuation of classical Marxism. It involves a very particular inflection, characterized by the new role assigned to theory. Instead of serving to systematize observable historical tendencies — as it did in Kautsky’s text of 1892 — theory sets itself up as a guarantee that these tendencies will eventually coincide with the type of social articulation proposed by the Marxist paradigm. In other words, orthodoxy is constituted on the ground of a growing disjuncture between Marxist theory and the political practice of Social Democracy. It is the laws of motion of the infrastructure, guaranteed by Marxist ‘science’, which provide the terrain for the overcoming of this disjuncture and assure both the transitory character of the existing tendencies and the future revolutionary reconstitution of the working class.

Let us examine, in this regard, Kautsky’s position on the relationship between party and unions, as expressed in his polemic with the theoreticians of the trade union movement.<sup>17</sup> Kautsky is perfectly aware of the strong tendencies toward fragmentation within the German working class: the rise of a labour aristocracy; the opposition between unionized and non-unionized workers; the counterposed interests of different wage categories; the conscious policy of the bourgeoisie to divide the working class; the presence of masses of Catholic workers subjected to a church populism which distances them from the Social Democrats, and so forth. He is equally conscious of the fact that the more *immediate material interests* predominate, the more tendencies toward fragmentation assert themselves; and that hence pure trade-union action cannot guarantee either the unity or the socialist determination of the working class.<sup>18</sup> These can be consolidated only if the immediate material interests of the working class are subordinated to the *Endziel*, the final socialist objective, and this presupposes the subordination of economic struggle to political struggle, and thus of the trade unions to the party.<sup>19</sup> But the party can represent this totalizing instance only insofar as it is the

depository of science — that is, of Marxist theory. The obvious fact that the working class was not following a socialist direction — English trade unionism was a resounding example of this, and by the turn of the century could no longer be ignored — led Kautsky to affirm a new privileged role for intellectuals which was to have such an important influence on Lenin's *What is to be Done*. Such intellectual mediation is limited in its effects, for, according to the Spinozist formula, its sole freedom consists in being the consciousness of necessity. However, it does entail the emergence of an articulating nexus that cannot simply be referred to the chain of a monistically conceived necessity.

The fissure that opened up in the identity of the class, the growing dissociation between the different subject positions of the workers, could only be surpassed by a future movement of the economic base whose advent was guaranteed by Marxist science. Consequently, everything depends on the predictive capacity of this science and on the necessary character of such predictions. It is no accident that the category of 'necessity' has to be affirmed with ever increasing virulence. It is well known how 'necessity' was understood by the Second International: as a natural necessity, founded on a combination of Marxism and Darwinism. The Darwinist influence has frequently been presented as a vulgar Marxist substitute for Hegelian dialectics; but the truth is that in the orthodox conception, Hegelianism and Darwinism combined to form a hybrid capable of satisfying strategic requirements. Darwinism alone does not offer 'guarantees for the future', since natural selection does not operate in a direction predetermined from the beginning.<sup>20</sup> Only if a Hegelian type of teleology is added to Darwinism — which is totally incompatible with it — can an evolutionary process be presented as a guarantee of future transitions.

This conception of class unity as a future unity assured by the action of ineluctable laws, had effects at a number of levels: on the type of articulation attributed to diverse subject positions; on the way of treating differences which could not be assimilated to the paradigm; and on the strategy for analysis of historical events. Concerning the first point, it is evident that if the revolutionary subject establishes its class identity at the level of the relations of production,<sup>21</sup> its presence at other levels can only be one of *exteriority* and it must adopt the form of '*representation of interests*'. The terrain of politics can only be a superstructure, insofar as it is a terrain of struggle between agents whose identity, conceived under the form of 'interests', has set itself up at another level. This essential identity

was thus *fixed*, once and for all, as an unalterable fact relating to the various forms of political and ideological representation into which the working class entered.<sup>22</sup>

Secondly, this reductionist problematic used two types of reasoning — which we may call the *argument from appearance* and the *argument from contingency* — to deal with differences that could not be assimilated to its own categories. The argument from appearance: everything presenting itself as different can be reduced to identity. This may take two forms: either appearance is a mere artifice of concealment, or it is a necessary form of the manifestation of essence. (An example of the first form: 'nationalism is a screen which hides the interests of the bourgeoisie'; an example of the second: 'the Liberal State is a necessary political form of capitalism'.) The argument from contingency: a social category or sector may not be reducible to the central identities of a certain form of society, but in that case its very marginality vis-à-vis the fundamental line of historical development allows us to discard it as irrelevant. (For example: 'because capitalism leads to the proletarianization of the middle classes and the peasantry, we can ignore these and concentrate our strategy on the conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat'.) Thus, in the argument from contingency, identity is rediscovered in a diachronic totality: an inexorable succession of stages allows existing social reality to be divided into phenomena that are necessary or contingent, according to the stage of that society's approaching maturity. History is therefore a continuous concretization of the abstract, an approximation to a paradigmatic purity which appears as both sense and direction of the process.

Finally the orthodox paradigm, qua analytic of the present, postulates a strategy of *recognition*. In as much as Marxism claims to know the unavoidable course of history in its essential determinations, the understanding of an actual event can only mean to identify it as a moment in a temporal succession that is fixed a priori. Hence discussions such as: is the revolution of year *x* in country *y* the bourgeois-democratic revolution? Or, what forms should the transition to socialism assume in this or that country?

The three areas of effects analysed above present a common characteristic: the concrete is reduced to the abstract. Diverse subject positions are reduced to manifestations of a single position; the plurality of differences is either reduced or rejected as contingent; the sense of the present is revealed through its location in an a priori succession of stages. It is precisely because the concrete is in this way reduced to the abstract, that history, society and social agents have,

for orthodoxy, *an essence which operates as their principle of unification*. And as this essence is not immediately visible, it is necessary to distinguish between a *surface* or appearance of society and an *underlying reality* to which the ultimate sense of every concrete presence must necessarily be referred, whatever the level of complexity in the system of mediations.

It is clear which strategic conception could be derived from this vision of the course of capitalism. The subject of this strategy was, of course, the workers' party. Kautsky vigorously rejected the revisionist notion of a 'popular party' because, in his view, it involved a transference of the interests of other classes to the interior of the party and, consequently, a loss of the revolutionary character of the movement. However, his supposedly radical position, based on the rejection of any compromise or alliance, was the centrepiece of a fundamentally conservative strategy.<sup>23</sup> Since his radicalism relied on a process which did not require political initiatives, it could only lead to quietism and waiting. Propaganda and organization were the two basic — in fact the only — tasks of the party. Propaganda was geared not to the creation of a broader 'popular will', through the winning of new sectors to the socialist cause, but above all to the reinforcing of working-class identity. As to organization, its expansion did not involve greater political participation in a number of fronts, but the construction of a ghetto where the working class led a self-focused and segregated existence. This progressive institutionalization of the movement was well suited to a perspective in which the final crisis of the capitalist system would come from the bourgeoisie's own labours, while the working class merely prepared for its intervention at the appropriate moment. Since 1881 Kautsky had stated: 'Our task is not to organize the revolution but to organize ourselves for the revolution; not *to make* the revolution but to take advantage of it.'<sup>24</sup>

Obviously, alliances did not represent for Kautsky a fundamental strategic principle. In concrete circumstances, a variety of alliances were possible at the level of empirical tactics; but in the long term, just as the revolution would have a purely proletarian character, so did the working class occupy an isolated position in the anti-capitalist struggle. Kautsky's analysis of internal contradictions in other sectors precisely demonstrates the impossibility of establishing long-term democratic and anti-capitalist alliances with them. In the case of the peasantry, he attempts to prove that it is a disintegrating sector, so that working-class defence of its interests is a reactionary policy opposed to the general line of economic progress. Similarly,

in the Kautskian analysis of imperialism, the middle classes are increasingly united under the ideological domination of finance capital and militarism. Characteristically, Kautsky is never for one moment aware that this political and ideological hold dangerously accentuates the workers' isolation, and that, faced with the offensive of capital, the working class should respond with a counter-offensive to win over these middle sectors to the anti-capitalist cause. This line of thought is closed because, in his analysis, the increasingly reactionary character of the middle sectors corresponds to objective and unalterable processes. For the same reason, the isolation of the workers is not a threat to socialism, because this is guaranteed by historically given laws which in the long term will prove the powerlessness of all bourgeois machinations.

A good example of how Kautsky conceived the proletarian struggle may be found in his concept of 'war of attrition'. This refers not to a special tactic but to the totality of political actions undertaken by the working class since the 1860s. Three aspects are involved in war of attrition: (1) the preconstituted identity of the working class, which increasingly undermines the opponent's power but is not significantly modified in the course of the struggle; (2) an equally preconstituted identity of the bourgeoisie, which increases or reduces its capacity for domination but under no circumstances alters its own nature; (3) a prefixed line of development — once again the 'inexorable laws' — which gives a directional tendency to the war of attrition. This strategy has been compared to Gramsci's 'war of position',<sup>25</sup> but in reality the two are profoundly different. War of position presupposes the concept of hegemony which, as we shall see, is incompatible with the idea of a linear, predetermined development and, above all, with the preconstituted character of Kautskian subjects.

The role assigned by orthodox Marxism to theory confronts us with a paradox. On the one hand, its role increases as the widening gap between 'present consciousness' and 'historical mission' of the class can only be externally bridged through political intervention. On the other hand, since the theory underpinning political intervention is presented as consciousness of a necessary and mechanical determination, the analysis becomes ever more determinist and economist to the very extent that *the composition of historical forces depends more on theoretical mediation*. This is even more evident in Plekhanov than in Kautsky. The incipient development of capitalism in Russia failed to create a bourgeois civilization, with the result that the meaning of Russian reality could only be unravelled

through a comparison with Western capitalist development. For Russian Marxists, therefore, the social phenomena of their country were symbols of a text which transcended them and was available for a full and explicit reading only in the capitalist West. This meant that theory was incomparably more important in Russia than in the West: if the 'necessary laws of history' were not universally valid, the fleeting reality of a strike, of a demonstration, of a process of accumulation, threatened to melt away. A reformist like Guglielmo Ferrero<sup>26</sup> could wax ironic about the orthodox claim that Marxism constituted a coherent and homogeneous theoretical field. In the end, if the doctrine was eclectic and heteroclitite, this scarcely affected the materiality of a social practice sanctioned by the ensemble of proletarian institutions — a practice which, in the revisionism controversy, began to establish its own relations of exteriority with theory. This, however, could not be Plekhanov's position, for he confronted phenomena which did not spontaneously point in a precise direction, but whose meaning relied on their insertion within an interpretative system. The more the meaning of the social depended upon theoretical formulation, the more the defence of orthodoxy turned into a political problem.

With these points in mind, it is not surprising that the principles of Marxist orthodoxy were given a much more rigid formulation in Plekhanov than in Kautsky. It is well known, for example, that he coined the term 'dialectical materialism'. But he was also responsible for the radical naturalism which led to such a strict separation between base and superstructure that the latter was considered to be no more than a combination of necessary expressions of the former. Moreover, Plekhanov's concept of economic base allows for no intervention by social forces: the economic process is completely determined by the productive forces, conceived as technology.<sup>27</sup> This rigid determination enables him to present society as a strict hierarchy of instances, with decreasing degrees of efficacy: '1) *the state of the productive forces*; 2) the economic relations these forces condition; 3) the socio-political system that has developed on the given economic "basis"; 4) the mentality of social man, which is determined in part by the economic conditions obtaining, and in part by the entire socio-political system that has arisen on that foundation; 5) the various ideologies that reflect the properties of that mentality.'<sup>28</sup> In *Socialism and Political Struggle* and *Our Differences*, Plekhanov formulated an equally rigid succession of stages through which the Russian revolutionary process had to pass, so that any 'uneven and combined development' was eliminated from the field of strategy.

All the early analysis of Russian Marxism — from Peter Struve's 'legal Marxism', through Plekhanov as the central moment, to Lenin's *Development of Capitalism in Russia* — tended to obliterate the study of specificities, representing these as nothing other than outwardly apparent or contingent forms of an essential reality: the abstract development of capitalism through which every society must pass.

Let us now make a final observation on orthodoxy. As we have seen, theory maintained that the growing disjuncture between final objective and current political practices would be resolved at some future moment, which operated as a *coincidentia oppositorum*. As this practice of recomposition, however, could not be left *entirely* to the future, a struggle had somehow to be waged in the present against the tendencies towards fragmentation. But since this struggle entailed forms of articulation which did not at that time *spontaneously* result from the laws of capitalism, it was necessary to introduce a social logic different from mechanical determinism — that is to say, a space that would restore *the autonomy of political initiative*. Although minimal, this space is present in Kautsky: it comprises the relations of exteriority, between the working class and socialism, which require the political mediation of intellectuals. There is a link here which cannot simply be explained by 'objective' historical determination. This space was necessarily broader for those tendencies which, in order to overcome the split between day-to-day practices and final objective, strove hardest to break with quietism and to achieve current political effects.<sup>29</sup> Rosa Luxemburg's spontaneism, and, more generally, the political strategies of the *Neue Linke* confirm this. The most creative tendencies within orthodoxy attempted to limit the effects of the 'logic of necessity', but the inevitable outcome was that they placed their discourse in a permanent dualism between a 'logic of necessity', producing ever fewer effects in terms of political practice, and a 'logic of contingency' which, by not determining its specificity, was incapable of theorizing itself.

Let us give two examples of the dualism created by these partial attempts to 'open the game'. The first is the concept of *morphological prediction* in Labriola. He stated: 'Historical foresight . . . (in *The Communist Manifesto*) does not imply, and this is still the case, either a chronological date or an advance picture of a social configuration, as was and is typical of old and new apocalypses and prophecies . . . In the theory of critical communism, it is the whole of society which, at a moment in the process, discovers the reason for its inevitable course, and which, at a salient point in its curve, sheds light on itself

and reveals its laws of motion. The prediction to which the *Manifesto* alludes for the first time was not chronological, of an anticipatory or promise-like nature; it was morphological, a word which, in my opinion, succinctly expresses everything.<sup>30</sup> Labriola was here waging a twofold battle. The first was directed against tendencies critical of Marxism — Croce, Gentile<sup>31</sup> — who, basing the unpredictability of history on the non-systematic character of events, found a unitary order only in the consciousness of the historian. For his part, Labriola stressed the objective character of historical laws. However, these were *morphological* — that is, their area of validity was restricted to certain fundamental tendencies. Labriola's second battle, then, was against the forms of dogmatism which converted general tendencies into immediately legible facts on the surface of historical life. It is now clear that the way in which this twofold battle was waged could not but introduce a dualism which, in Labriola, found expression in the counterposition of historical development as narration and as morphology; and, more generally, in the decreasing capacity of Engels's dialectical paradigm to explain history.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, this dichotomy presents the same double void that we found in Rosa Luxemburg. For, the 'narrative' elements are counterposed to the 'morphological' ones not as something positive, with its own internal necessity, but as the contingent reverse of morphological necessity. According to Badaloni, the 'real unfolding of events can (for Labriola) give rise to intricate and unforeseeable vicissitudes. Nonetheless, what counts is that the understanding of these vicissitudes should occur within the genetical hypothesis (class contradiction and its progressive simplification). Thus, the proletariat is located not in an indeterminate historical time, but in that peculiar historical time which is dominated by the crisis of the bourgeois social formation.'<sup>33</sup> In other words, 'morphological necessity' constitutes a theoretico-discursive terrain which comprises not only its own distinctive territory but also what it excludes from itself — contingency. If an ensemble of 'events' are conceptualized as 'contingent', they are not conceptualized at all, except in their lack of certain attributes existent in the morphological tendencies opposed to them. However, since the life of society is ever more complex than the morphological categories of Marxist discourse — and this complexity was Labriola's starting point — the only possible consequence is that theory becomes an increasingly irrelevant tool for the understanding of concrete social processes.

Thus, to avoid falling into complete agnosticism, it is necessary at some point to introduce other explanatory categories. Labriola does

this, for example, in his concrete analyses, where diverse social categories are not simply conceptualized in their 'contingency', but are each endowed with a certain necessity or lawfulness of their own. What is the relationship between these 'factual' structural complexes and the structures which are the object of morphological prediction? A first possible solution would be 'dialectical': to maintain a monist perspective which conceives complexity as a system of mediations.<sup>34</sup> Labriola could not adopt this solution, however, because it would have forced him to extend the effects of necessity to the surface of historical life — the very area from which he wanted to displace them. But if the dialectical solution is rejected, it is not possible to pass logically from morphological analysis to the distinctive lawfulness of partial totalities. The transition therefore assumes an *external character* — which is to say that the conceptualization of these legalities is *external to Marxist theory*. Marxist theory cannot, then, be the 'complete and harmonious world-system' presented by Plekhanov and thinkable only within a closed model. The necessity/contingency dualism opens the way to a pluralism of structural legalities whose internal logics and mutual relations have to be determined.

This can be seen even more clearly if we examine Austro-Marxism, our second example of an 'open orthodoxy'. Here we find a more radical and systematic effort than Labriola's to diversify the starting points, to multiply the theoretical categories, and to autonomize areas of society in their specific determinations. Otto Bauer, in his obituary on Max Adler, referred to the beginning of the school in the following terms: 'Whereas Marx and Engels began from Hegel, and the later Marxists from materialism, the more recent "Austro-Marxists" had at their point of departure Kant and Mach.'<sup>35</sup> The Austro-Marxists were conscious of the obstacles to working-class unity in the dual monarchy, and of the fact that such unity depended upon constant political initiative. They therefore understood well what, from the different perspective of the Leninist tradition, was termed 'uneven and combined development'. 'In the Austro-Hungarian monarchy there are examples of all the economic forms to be found in Europe, including Turkey . . . The light of socialist propaganda shines everywhere in the midst of these divergent economic and political conditions. This creates a picture of extreme diversity . . . What exists in the International as a chronological development — the socialism of artisans, journeymen, workers in manufacture, factory workers, and agricultural workers, which undergoes alterations, with the political, the social, or the intellectual aspect of the movement predominating at any given

moment — takes places contemporaneously in Austria.<sup>36</sup>

In this mosaic of social and national situations, it was impossible to think of national identities as ‘superstructural’ or of class unity as a necessary consequence of the infrastructure. Indeed, such a unity depended on a complex political construction. In the words of Otto Bauer: ‘It is an intellectual force which maintains unity . . . “Austro-Marxism” today, as a product of unity and a force for the maintenance of unity, is nothing but the ideology of unity of the workers movement.’<sup>37</sup>

The moment of class unity is, thus, a political moment. The constitutive centre of what we might call a society’s *relational configuration* or *articulatory form* is displaced towards the field of the superstructures, so that the very distinction between economic base and superstructure becomes blurred and problematic. Three main types of Austro-Marxist theoretical intervention are closely linked to this new strategic perspective: the attempt to limit the area of validity of ‘historical necessity’; the suggestion of new fronts of struggle based upon the complexity of the social that was characteristic of mature capitalism; and the effort to think in a non-reductive manner the specificity of subject positions other than those of class. The first type of intervention is mainly connected with Max Adler’s philosophical reformulation and his peculiar form of neo-Kantianism. The Kantian rethinking of Marxism produced a number of liberating effects: it broadened the audience for socialism, insofar as the justness of its postulates could be posed in terms of a universality transcending class bounds; it broke with the naturalist conception of social relations and, by elaborating concepts such as the ‘social a priori’, introduced a strictly discursive element into the constitution of social objectivity; and finally, it allowed Marxists to conceive the infrastructure as a terrain whose conformation depended upon forms of consciousness, and not upon the naturalistic movement of the forces of production. The second type of intervention also placed the base/superstructure distinction into question. In the discussion regarding Kautsky’s *Road to Power*, Bauer, for example,<sup>38</sup> tried to show how wrong it was to conceive the economy as a homogeneous field dominated by an endogenous logic, given that in the monopoly and imperialist phase political, technico-organizational and scientific transformations were increasingly part of the industrial apparatus. In his view, if the laws of competition previously functioned as natural powers, they now had to pass through the minds of men and women. Hence the emphasis on the growing interlock between state and economy, which in the

1920s led to the debate about ‘organized capitalism’. Views also changed about the points of rupture and antagonism created by the new configuration of capitalism: these were now located not solely in the relations of production, but in a number of areas of the social and political structure. Hence too, the new importance attributed to the very dispersion of the day-to-day struggle (*revolutionäre Kleinarbeit*), conceived in neither an evolutionary nor a reformist sense,<sup>39</sup> and the fresh significance acquired by the moment of political articulation. (This is reflected, among other things, in the new way of posing the relationship between party and intellectuals.<sup>40</sup>) Finally, with regard to the new subject positions and the ensuing break with class reductionism, it is sufficient to mention Bauer’s work on the national question and Renner’s on legal institutions.

The general pattern of the theoretico-strategic intervention of Austro-Marxism should now be clear: insofar as the practical efficacy of autonomous political intervention is broadened, the discourse of ‘historical necessity’ loses its relevance and withdraws to the horizon of the social (in exactly the same way that, in deist discourse, the effects of God’s presence in the world are drastically reduced). This, in turn, requires a proliferation of new discursive forms to occupy the terrain left vacant. The Austro-Marxists, however, failed to reach the point of breaking with dualism and eliminating the moment of ‘morphological’ necessity. In the theoretico-political universe of *fin-de-siècle* Marxism, this decisive step was taken only by Sorel, through his contrast between ‘*mélange*’ and ‘*bloc*’. We shall return to this below.

### The Second Response to the Crisis: Revisionism

The orthodox response to the ‘crisis of Marxism’ sought to overcome the disjuncture between ‘theory’ and ‘observable tendencies of capitalism’ by intransigently affirming the validity of the former and the artificial or transitory character of the latter. Thus it would seem very simple to conclude that the revisionist response was symmetrically opposed, especially since Bernstein himself insisted on many occasions that he had no major disagreements with the programme and practices of the SPD as they had materialized since the Erfurt Congress, and that the only purpose of his intervention was to realize an *aggiornamento* adapting the theory to the concrete practices of the movement. Nevertheless, such a conclusion would obscure important dimensions of Bernstein’s intervention. In particular, it would lead us into the error of identifying *reformism* with *revision-*

ism.<sup>41</sup> The trade union leaders, who were the true spokesmen for a reformist policy within the SPD, expressed little interest in Bernstein's theoretical propositions and remained strictly neutral in the ensuing controversy — when they did not openly support orthodoxy.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, in crucial political debates on the mass strike<sup>43</sup> and the attitude to war, Bernstein's position was not only different from but strictly opposed to that of the reformist leaders in the trade unions and the party. Thus, in attempting to identify the precise difference between reformism and revisionism, we must stress that *what is essential in a reformist practice is political quietism and the corporatist confinement of the working class*. The reformist leader attempts to defend the gains and immediate interests of the class, and he consequently tends to consider it as a segregated sector, endowed with a perfectly defined identity and limits. But a 'revisionist' theory is not necessary for this; indeed, a 'revolutionary' theory can — in many cases — better fulfil the same role by isolating the working class and leaving to an indeterminate future any questioning of the existing power structure. We have already referred to the conservative character of Kautskian revolutionism. Reformism does not identify with either term of the revisionism/orthodoxy alternative but cuts across the two.

The basic issue confronting revisionist and orthodox theoreticians was not, therefore, the question of reformism. Neither was it the problem of peaceful or violent transition from capitalism to socialism — in relation to which the 'orthodox' did not have a clear and unanimous position. *The main point of divergence was that, whereas orthodoxy considered that the fragmentation and division characteristic of the new stage of capitalism would be overcome through changes in the infrastructure, revisionism held that this was to be achieved through autonomous political intervention*. The autonomy of the political from the economic base is the true novelty of Bernstein's argument. In fact, it has been pointed out<sup>44</sup> that behind each of Bernstein's critiques of classical Marxist theory, there was an attempt to recover the political initiative in particular spheres. Revisionism, at its best moments, represented a real effort to break with the corporative isolation of the working class. It is, also true, however, that just as the political was emerging as an autonomous instance, it was used to validate a 'reformist' practice which was to a large extent its opposite. This is the paradox that we must try to explain. It refers us to certain limitations in Bernstein's rupture with economism which would only be rigorously overcome in Gramsci. Autonomy of the political

and its limits: we must examine how these two moments are structured.

It is important to recognize that Bernstein, more clearly than any representative of orthodoxy, understood the changes affecting capitalism as it entered the monopoly era. His analyses were, in this sense, closer to the problematic of a Hilferding or a Lenin than to the orthodox theorizations of the time.<sup>45</sup> Bernstein also grasped the political consequences of capitalist reorganization. The three main changes — a-symmetry between the concentration of enterprises and the concentration of patrimonies; the subsistence and growth of the middle strata; the role of economic planning in the prevention of crises — could only involve a total change in the assumptions upon which Social Democracy had hitherto been based. It was not the case that the evolution of the economy was proletarianizing the middle classes and the peasantry and heightening the polarization of society, nor that the transition to socialism could be expected to follow from a revolutionary outbreak consequent upon a serious economic crisis. Under such conditions, socialism had to change its terrain and strategy, and the key theoretical moment was the break with the rigid base/superstructure distinction that had prevented any conception of the autonomy of the political. It was this latter instance to which the moment of recomposition and overcoming of fragmentation was now transferred in the revisionist analysis. 'Sciences, arts, a whole series of social relations are today much less dependent on economics than formerly, or, in order to give no room for misconception, the point of economic development attained today leaves the ideological, and especially the ethical, factors greater space for independent activity than was formerly the case. In consequence of this the interdependency of cause and effect between technical, economic evolution of other social tendencies is becoming always more indirect, and from that the necessities of the first are losing much of their power of dictating the form of the latter.'<sup>46</sup>

It is only this autonomization of the political, as opposed to the dictates of the economic base, that permits it to play this role of recomposition and reunification against infrastructural tendencies which, if abandoned to themselves, can only lead to fragmentation. This can clearly be seen in Bernstein's conception of the dialectic of working-class unity and division. Economically, the working class always appears more and more divided. The modern proletariat is not that dispossessed mass of which Marx and Engels wrote in the *Manifesto*: 'it is just in the most advanced of manufacturing industries

that a whole hierarchy of differentiated workmen are to be found, between those groups only a moderate feeling of identity exists.<sup>47</sup> This diversification of interests — which was most apparent in the English case — was not simply the residue of a guildist past, as Cunow had argued, but was the result of the establishment of a democratic State. Although, under conditions of political repression, unity in struggle placed sectoral interests on a secondary level, these tended to blossom once again in a context of freedom.

Now, if the tendency towards division is inscribed in the very structure of modern capitalism, what is the source of the opposite moment, the tendency towards unification? According to Bernstein, it is the party. Thus, he speaks of the 'necessity of an organ of the class struggle which holds the entire class together in spite of its fragmentation through different employment, and that is the Social Democracy as a political party. In it, the special interest of the economic group is submerged in favour of the general interest of those who depend on income for their labour, of all the underprivileged.'<sup>48</sup> As we saw earlier, in Kautsky the party also represented the universal moment of the class; but while in his case political unity was the scientific prefiguration of a real unity to be achieved by the movements of the infrastructure, in Bernstein the moment of political articulation could not be reduced to such movements. The specificity of the political link escapes the chain of necessity; the irreducible space of the political, which in Kautsky was limited to the mediating role of the intelligentsia, appears here considerably enlarged.

However, in Bernstein's analysis of political mediation as constitutive of class unity, a barely perceptible ambiguity has slipped through to vitiate his entire theoretical construction. The ambiguity is this: if the working class appears increasingly divided in the economic sphere, and if its unity is autonomously constructed at the political level, in what sense is this political unity a *class* unity? The problem was not posed for orthodoxy, as the non-correspondence between economic and political identity was ultimately to be resolved by the evolution of the economy itself. In Bernstein's case, the logical conclusion would seem to be that political unity can be constituted only through an overcoming of the *class limitations* of the different fractions of workers, and that there should thus be a permanent structural hiatus between economic and political subjectivity. This is, however, a conclusion which Bernstein never reaches in his analysis. On the one hand, he insists that Social Democracy must be a party of all the oppressed and not only of the workers, but on the

other he conceives this unity as that of an ensemble of sectors which 'accept the point of view of the workers and recognize them as the leading class'. As his biographer Peter Gay indicates,<sup>49</sup> Bernstein never went beyond this point. Consequently, a link is missing in his reasoning. The *class* character of the unification between the political and the economic is not produced in either of the two spheres, and the argument remains suspended in a void.

This conclusion may perhaps be excessive, because it assumes that Bernstein's reasoning moves on the same level as that of Kautsky or Rosa Luxemburg — that he is referring to *necessary* subjects of an ineluctable historical process. The truth is, however, that by denying that history is dominated by an abstract determinist logic, Bernstein precisely shifted the debate from this plane. In his conception, the centrality of the workers seems instead to refer to a historically contingent line of argument — for example, that the working class is better prepared than other sectors to fulfil the leading role, given its degree of concentration and organization. Yet the problem remains of why Bernstein presented these advantages — which were at most conjunctural — as *irreversible achievements*. The same ambiguity can be found in Bernstein's *dictum* that 'the path is everything and the goal is nothing'. Traditionally, this has been considered a typical 'gradualist' slogan.<sup>50</sup> However, in some of its meanings, *which produce both theoretical and political effects within the revisionist discourse*, gradualism is not *logically* entailed. The only necessary implication of this statement is that the working class *can* obtain concrete gains within the capitalist system, and that revolution cannot therefore be considered as an absolute moment in the passage from total dispossession to radical liberation. This does not *necessarily* imply the gradualist conception of slow, unilinear and irreversible advances, although it is true that Bernstein's line of argument concerning democratic advances links them to a gradualist perspective. Once again, we must therefore pose the problem of the terrain where these logically distinct structural moments unite.

This brings our investigation to the concrete forms of Bernstein's rupture with orthodox determinism, and to the type of concepts he deploys in order to fill the space opened by its collapse. When Bernstein questions whether any general mechanism can validly explain the course of history, his argument assumes a characteristic form: he does not criticise the type of historical causality proposed by orthodoxy, but attempts to create a space where the free play of subjectivity will be possible in history. Accepting the orthodox identification of objectivity and mechanical causality, he merely tries

to limit its effects.<sup>51</sup> He does not deny the scientific character of a part of Marxism, but he refuses to extend it to the point of creating a closed system that will cover the entire field of political prediction. The critique of the dogmatic rationalism of orthodoxy takes the form of a Kantian dualism. For Bernstein, there were three particular objections to the consideration of Marxism as a closed scientific system. First, Marxism had failed to show that socialism necessarily followed from capitalism's collapse. Secondly, this could not be demonstrated because history was not a simple objective process: *will* also played a role in it. Hence, history could only be explained as the result of an interaction between objective and subjective factors. Thirdly, as socialism was a *party programme* and therefore founded upon ethical decision, it could not be entirely scientific — could not be based upon objective statements whose truth or falsehood had to be accepted by all. Thus, the autonomy of the ethical subject was the basis of Bernstein's break with determinism.

Now — and this point is crucial — the introduction of the ethical subject cannot dispel the ambiguities we found earlier in Bernstein's reasoning. The ethical subject's free decision can at most create an area of indeterminacy in history, but it cannot be the foundation for a gradualist thesis. It is here that a new postulate — the progressive and ascending character of human history — intervenes to provide the terrain on which the political and the economic combine, imparting a sense of direction to every concrete achievement. The concept of evolution, *Entwicklung*,<sup>52</sup> plays a decisive role in the Bernsteinian discourse: in fact, his entire schema obtains its coherence from it. The unification of the political and economic spheres takes place not on the basis of theoretically defined articulations, but through a tendential movement underlying them both and dictated by the laws of evolution. For Bernstein, these laws are not at all the same as in the orthodox system: they include not only antagonistic but also harmonious processes. Yet in both cases they are conceived as *totalizing contexts* which fix a priori the meaning of every event. Thus, although 'the facts' are freed from the essentialist connections which linked them together in the orthodox conception, they are later reunited in a general theory of progress unconnected to any determinable mechanism. The rupture with mechanist objectivism, which considered classes as transcendent subjects, is achieved through the postulation of a new transcendent subject — the ethical subject — which imposes ascendancy in a humanity increasingly freed from economic necessity.<sup>53</sup> From here, it is impossible to move towards a theory of articulation and hegemony.

This clarifies why, in Bernstein, the autonomization of the political can be linked to acceptance of a reformist practice and a gradualist strategy. For if every advance is irreversible — given the *Entwicklung* postulate — its consolidation no longer depends upon an unstable articulation of forces and *ceases to be a political problem*. If, on the other hand, the ensemble of democratic advances depended upon a contingent correlation of forces, then abstract consideration of the justness of each demand would not be sufficient reason to assert its progressiveness. For example, a negative realignment of forces might be brought about by an ultra-left demand or its opposite, an absence of radical political initiatives in a critical conjuncture. But if the ensemble of democratic advances depends solely upon a law of progress, then the progressive character of any struggle or conjunctural demand is defined independently of its correlation with other forces operating at a given moment. The fact that the demands of the workers movement are considered just and progressive, and judged separately from their correlation with other forces, erases the only basis for criticism of the corporative confinement of the working class. Here lie the premises for a coincidence between theoretical revisionism and practical reformism: the broadening of political initiative to a number of democratic fronts never enters into contradiction with the quietism and corporatism of the working class.

This can be clearly seen if we consider the revisionist theory of the State. For orthodoxy, the problem was straightforward: the State was an instrument of class domination, and Social Democracy could only participate in its institutions with the purpose of spreading its own ideology, and defending and organizing the working class. Such participation was therefore marked by exteriority. Bernstein sees this problem from the opposite perspective: the growing economic power of the working class, the advance in social legislation, the 'humanization' of capitalism, all lead to the 'nationalization' of the working class; the worker is not merely a proletarian, he has also become a citizen. Consequently, according to Bernstein, the functions of social organization have a greater influence within the State than do those of class domination; its democratization transforms it into a State 'of all the people'. Once again, Bernstein has understood better than orthodoxy the basic truth that the working class is *already* on the terrain of the State, and that it is sterile dogmatism to seek to maintain with it pure relations of exteriority. In his discourse, however, this is immediately transformed into a totally illegitimate prediction: namely, that the State will become increasingly democratic as a necessary consequence of 'historical

evolution’.

Having reached this point, we may now apply the test we used for Rosa Luxemburg: to follow the logical lines of Bernstein’s argument, while eliminating the essentialist presuppositions (in this case, the postulate of progress as a unifying tendency) which limit its effects. Two conclusions immediately arise from this test. First, democratic advances within the State cease to be cumulative and begin to depend upon a relationship of forces that cannot be determined a priori. The object of struggle is not simply punctual gains, but forms of articulating forces that will allow these gains to be consolidated. *And these forms are always reversible.* In that fight, the working class must struggle from where it really is: both *within* and *outside* the State. But — and this is the second conclusion — Bernstein’s very clear-sightedness opens up a much more disquieting possibility. If the worker is no longer just proletarian but also citizen, consumer, and participant in a plurality of positions within the country’s cultural and institutional apparatus; if, moreover, this ensemble of positions is no longer united by any ‘law of progress’ (nor, of course, by the ‘necessary laws’ of orthodoxy), then the relations between them become an open articulation which offers no a priori guarantee that it will adopt a given form. There is also a possibility that contradictory and mutually neutralizing subject positions will arise. In that case, more than ever, democratic advance will necessitate a proliferation of political initiatives in different social areas — as required by revisionism, but with the difference that the meaning of each initiative comes to depend upon its relation with the others. To think this dispersion of elements and points of antagonism, and to conceive their articulation outside any a priori schema of unification, is something that goes far beyond the field of revisionism. Although it was the revisionists who first posed the problem in its most general terms, the beginnings of an adequate response would only be found in the Gramscian conception of ‘war of position’.

### The Third Response to the Crisis: Revolutionary Syndicalism

Our inquiry into revisionism has brought us to the point where Bernstein, paradoxically, faces the same dilemma as all orthodox currents (including his arch-enemy Rosa Luxemburg): the economic base is incapable of assuring class unity *in the present*; while politics, the sole terrain where that present unity can be constructed, is unable

convincingly to guarantee the *class* character of the unitary subjects. This antinomy can be perceived more clearly in revolutionary syndicalism, which constituted a third type of response to the ‘crisis of Marxism’. In Sorel the antinomy is drawn with particularly sharp lines, because he was more conscious than Bernstein, or any orthodox theoretician, of the true dimensions of the crisis and of the price theory had to pay in order to overcome it in a satisfactory manner. We find in Sorel not only the postulation of an area of ‘contingency’ and ‘freedom’, replacing the broken links in the chain of necessity, but also an effort to think the specificity of that ‘logic of contingency’, of that new terrain on which a field of totalizing effects is reconstituted. In this sense, it is instructive to refer to the key moments of his evolution.<sup>54</sup>

Even in the relatively orthodox beginnings of Sorel’s Marxist career, both the sources of his political interest and the theoretical assumptions behind his analysis showed a marked originality and were considerably more sophisticated than those of a Kautsky or a Plekhanov. He was far from keeping to the established idea of an underlying historical mechanism that both unified a given form of society and governed the transitions between diverse forms. Indeed, Sorel’s chief focus of interest — and hence his frequent reference to Vico — was the type of moral qualities which allowed a society to remain united and in a process of ascension. Having no guarantee of positivity, social transformations were penetrated by negativity as one of their possible destinies. It was not simply the case that a given form of society was opposed by a different, positive form destined to replace it; it also faced the possibility of its own decay and disintegration, as was the case of the ancient world. What Sorel found attractive in Marxism was not in fact a theory of the necessary laws of historical evolution, but rather the theory of the formation of a new agent — the proletariat — capable of operating as an agglutinative force that would reconstitute around itself a higher form of civilization and supplant declining bourgeois society.

This dimension of Sorel’s thought is present from the beginning. In his writings prior to the revisionism controversy, however, it is combined with an acceptance of the tendencies of capitalist development postulated by orthodoxy. In these writings, Sorel sees Marxism as a ‘new real metaphysics’. All real science, he argues, is constituted on the basis of an ‘expressive support’, which introduces an artificial element into analysis. This can be the origin of utopian or mythical errors, but in the case of industrial society there is a growing unification of the social terrain around the image of the

mechanism. The expressive support of Marxism — the social character of labour and the category of ‘commodity’, which increasingly eliminates qualitative distinctions — is not an arbitrary base, because it is the moulding and constitutive paradigm of social relations. Socialism, qua collective appropriation of the means of production, represents the necessary culmination of the growing socialization and homogenization of labour. The increasing sway of this productivist paradigm relies on the laws of motion of capitalism, which are not questioned by Sorel at this point of his career. But even so, the agent conscious of its own interests — the one that will shift society to a higher form — is not constituted by a simple objective movement. Here another element of Sorel’s analysis intervenes: Marxism is not for him merely a scientific analysis of society; it is also the ideology uniting the proletariat and giving a sense of direction to its struggles. The ‘expressive supports’, therefore, operate as elements aggregating and condensing the historical forces that Sorel will call blocs. It should be clear that, vis-à-vis orthodox Marxism, this analysis already shifts the terrain on a crucial point: the field of so-called ‘objective laws’ has lost its character as the rational substratum of the social, becoming instead the ensemble of forms through which a class constitutes itself as a dominant force and imposes its will on the rest of society. However, as the validity of these laws is not questioned, the distance from orthodoxy is ultimately not that considerable.

The separation begins when Sorel, starting from the revisionism debate, accepts *en bloc* Bernstein’s and Croce’s critiques of Marxism, but in order to extract very different conclusions. What is striking in Sorel is the *radicalism* with which he accepts the consequences of the ‘crisis of Marxism’. Unlike Bernstein, he does not make the slightest attempt to replace orthodoxy’s historical rationalism with an alternative evolutionist view, and the possibility that a form of civilization may disintegrate always remains open in his analysis. The *totality* as a founding rational substratum has been dissolved, and what now exists is *mélange*. Under these circumstances, how can one think the possibility of a process of recomposition? Sorel’s answer centres on social classes, which no longer play the role of structural locations in an objective system, but are rather poles of reaggregation that he calls ‘blocs’. The possibility of unity in society is thus referred to the will of certain groups to impose their conception of economic organization. Sorel’s philosophy, in fact — influenced by Nietzsche and in particular by Bergson — is one of action and will, in which the future is unforeseeable, and hinges on will. Further-

more, the level at which the forces in struggle find their unity is that of an ensemble of images or ‘language figures’ — foreshadowing the theory of myth. However, the consolidation of classes as historical forces cemented by a ‘political idea’ is reliant upon their confrontation with opposing forces. Once its identity ceased to be based on a process of infrastructural unity (at this level there is only *mélange*), the working class came to depend upon a *split* from the capitalist class which could only be completed in struggle against it. For Sorel, ‘war’ thus becomes the condition for working-class identity, and the search for common areas with the bourgeoisie can only lead to its own weakening. This consciousness of a *split* is a juridical consciousness — Sorel sees the construction of revolutionary subjectivity as a process in which the proletariat becomes aware of a set of rights opposing it to the class adversary and establishes a set of new institutions that will consolidate these rights.<sup>55</sup> Sorel, however, an ardent Dreyfusard, does not see a necessary contradiction between the plurality of working-class positions within the political and economic system: he is a partisan of democracy and of the political struggle of the proletariat, and even considers the possibility that the working class, while in no way *economically* linked to the middle sectors, could become a pole for their political regroupment.

We see a clear pattern in Sorel’s evolution: like all the tendencies struggling against the quietism of orthodoxy, he is compelled to displace the constitutive moment of class unity to the political level; but as his break with the category of ‘historical necessity’ is more radical than in other tendencies, he also feels obliged to specify the founding bond of political unity. This can be seen even more clearly when we move to the third stage of his thought, which corresponds to the great disillusion following the triumph of the Dreyfusard coalition. Millerand’s brand of socialism is integrated into the system; corruption spreads; there is a continuous loss of proletarian identity; and energy saps away from the only class which, in Sorel’s eyes, has the possibility of a heroic future that will remodel declining bourgeois civilization. Sorel then becomes a decided enemy of democracy, seeing it as the main culprit for that dispersion and fragmentation of subject positions with which Marxism had to grapple at the turn of the century. It was therefore necessary, at whatever cost, to restore the split and to reconstitute the working class as a unitary subject. As is well known, this led Sorel to reject political struggle and to affirm the syndicalist myth of the general strike. ‘(We) know that the general strike is indeed what I have said: the *myth* in which Socialism is wholly comprised, *i.e.* a body of

images capable of evoking instinctively all the sentiments which correspond to the different manifestations of the war undertaken by Socialism against modern society. Strikes have engendered in the proletariat the noblest, deepest and most moving sentiments that they possess; the general strike groups them all in a co-ordinated picture, and, by bringing them together, gives to each one of them its maximum of intensity; appealing to their painful memories of particular conflicts, it colours with an intense life all the details of the composition presented to consciousness. We thus obtain that intuition of Socialism which language cannot give us with perfect clearness — and we obtain it as a whole, perceive it instantaneously.<sup>56</sup>

The syndicalist 'general strike', or the 'revolution' in Marx, is a myth in that it functions as an ideological point of condensation for proletarian identity, constituted on the basis of the dispersion of subject positions. It is the one type of recomposing link that remains once political struggle has been discarded, and once it is thought that the economy of monopolies and imperialism — seen by Sorel as involving a process of refeudalization — is heightening the tendencies toward disintegration. More generally, one recognizes the old theme of *anti-physis* in Sorel's affirmation that societies have a 'natural' tendency to decay, and that the tendency to greatness is 'artificial'. Thus, violence is the only force which can keep alive the antagonism described by Marx. 'If a capitalist class is energetic, it is constantly affirming its determination to defend itself; its frank and consistently reactionary attitude contributes at least as greatly as proletarian violence towards keeping distinct that cleavage between classes which is the basis of all Socialism.'<sup>57</sup> From this perspective, it matters little whether or not the general strike can be realized: its role is that of a regulating principle, which allows the proletariat to think the *mélange* of social relations as organized around a clear line of demarcation; the category of totality, eliminated as an objective description of reality, is reintroduced as a mythical element establishing the unity of the workers' consciousness. As de Paola has pointed out,<sup>58</sup> the notion of 'cognitive instrument' — or expressive support — whose artificiality was recognized from the beginning, has been broadened to include fictions.

For Sorel, then, the possibility of a dichotomous division of society is given not as a datum of the social structure, but as a construction at the level of the 'moral factors' governing group conflict. Here we come face to face with the problem that we have found whenever a Marxist tendency has attempted to break with economism and to establish class unity at some other level. Why

does this politically or mythically reconstituted subject have to be a *class* subject? But whereas the inadequacy of Rosa Luxemburg's or Labriola's rupture with economism created the conditions for the invisibility of the double void that appeared in their discourses, in Sorel's case the very radicality of his anti-economism made this void clearly visible. So much so that some of his followers, having abandoned hope of a revolutionary recovery of the working class, gave themselves to a search for some other substitute myth capable of assuring the struggle against bourgeois decadence. It is known that they found it in nationalism. This was the avenue through which a *part* of Sorel's intellectual legacy contributed to the rise of fascism. Thus, in 1912 his disciple Edouard Berth was able to affirm: 'In fact, it is necessary that the two-sided nationalist and syndicalist movement, both parallel and synchronic, should lead to the complete expulsion of the kingdom of gold and to the triumph of heroic values over the ignoble bourgeois materialism in which present-day Europe is suffocating. In other words, it is necessary that this awakening of Force and Blood against Gold — whose first symptoms have been revealed by Pareto and whose signal has been given by Sorel in his *Réflexions sur la violence* and by Maurras in *Si le coup de force est possible* — should conclude with the absolute defeat of plutocracy.'<sup>59</sup>

Of course, this is merely *one* of the possible derivations from Sorel's analysis, and it would be historically false and analytically unfounded to conclude that it is a necessary outcome.<sup>60</sup> Historically false, because Sorel's influence made itself felt in a number of directions — it was, for example, crucial in the formation of Gramsci's thought. Analytically unfounded, because such a teleological interpretation assumes that the transition from *class* to *nation* was necessarily determined by the very structure of Sorel's thought, whereas the latter's most specific and original moment was precisely the indeterminate, non-apriori character of the mythically constituted subjects. Furthermore, this indeterminacy is not a weakness of the theory, for it affirms that social reality itself is indeterminate (*mélange*) and that any unification turns on the recomposing practices of a *bloc*. In this sense, there is no *theoretical* reason why the mythical reconstitution should not move in the direction of fascism, but equally none to exclude its advance in another direction — such as Bolshevism, for example, which Sorel enthusiastically welcomed. The decisive point — and this is what makes Sorel the most profound and original thinker of the Second International — is that the very identity of social agents becomes indeterminate and that every

'mythical' fixation of it depends upon a struggle. The concept of 'hegemony' as it emerged in Russian Social Democracy — which, as we shall see, also supposed a logic of contingency — was from this point of view much less radical. Neither Lenin nor Trotsky was capable of questioning the *necessity* for social agents to have a class character. Only with Gramsci did the two traditions converge in his concept of 'historical bloc', where the concept of 'hegemony' derived from Leninism meets in a new synthesis with the concept of 'bloc' derived from Sorel.

## Notes to Chapter One

1. R. Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*, London (n.d.), p. 48.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 73–74.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 64–65. Emphasis in the original.

4. It is important to note that Bernstein's intervention in the German debate on the mass strike (*Der Politische Massenstreik und die Politische Lage der Sozialdemokratie in Deutschland*) refers to two basic differences between East and West — the complexity and resistance of civil society in the West, and the weakness of the State in Russia — which will later be central to Gramsci's argument. For an overview of the debate, see M. Salvadori, 'La socialdemocrazia tedesca e la rivoluzione russa del 1905. Il dibattito sullo sciopero di massa e sulle differenze fra Oriente e Occidente', in E.J. Hobsbawm et al., eds., *Storia del marxismo*, Milan 1979, vol. 2, pp. 547–594.

5. Cf. T. Todorov, *Théories du symbole*, Paris 1977, p. 291. 'One could say that there is a condensation every time a single signifier leads us to comprehend more than one signified; or more plainly: *every time that the signified is more abundant than the signifier*. The great German mythologist Creuzer already defined the symbol in that way: by "the inadequacy of being and form, and by the overflowing of the content compared to its expression".'

6. Although Rosa Luxemburg's work is the highest point in the *theoretical* elaboration of the mechanism of mass strike, the latter was posed as the fundamental form of struggle by the entire *Neue Linke*. See for example, A. Pannekoek, 'Marxist Theory and Revolutionary Tactics', in A. Smart, ed., *Pannekoek and Gorter's Marxism*, London 1978, pp. 50–73.

7. R. Luxemburg, p. 30.

8. Recently, a number of studies have discussed the fatalist or non-fatalist character of Luxemburgist spontaneism. In our opinion, however, these have given excessive emphasis to a relatively secondary problem, such as the alternative between mechanical collapse and conscious intervention of the class. The assertion that capitalism will mechanically collapse is so absurd that, as far as we know, nobody has upheld it. The decisive problem is, instead, that of knowing whether the subject of the anti-capitalist struggle does or does not constitute its entire identity within the capitalist relations of production; and, in this respect, Rosa Luxemburg's position is unequivocally affirmative. For that reason, statements concerning the inevitability of socialism are not simply concessions to the rhetoric of the time or the result of a psychological need, as Norman Geras maintains (Cf. N. Geras, *The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg*, London 1976, p. 36), but rather the nodal point giving meaning to her entire theoretical and strategic

structure. As, according to Rosa Luxemburg, the advent of socialism has to be entirely explained *on the basis of the logic of capitalist development*, the revolutionary subject can only be the working class. (On Luxemburg's dogmatic adherence to Marx's theory of pauperization as the basis for the revolutionary determination of the working class, see G. Badia, 'L'analisi dello sviluppo capitalistico in Rosa Luxemburg', Feltrinelli Institute, *Annali*, Milan, p. 252.)

9. K. Kautsky, *The Class Struggle*, New York 1971.

10. 'The object of his (Kautsky's) entire struggle against revisionism was to be that of preserving a notion of the programme not as a complex of determinate political demands — destined to establish the initiative of the party in specific phases of struggle, and as such modifiable from time to time — but as an indissoluble bloc of theory and politics, within which the two terms lost their respective fields of autonomy and Marxism became the finalist ideology of the proletariat.' (L. Paggi, 'Intellettuai, teoria e partito nel marxismo della Seconda Internazionale'. Introduction to M. Adler, *Il socialismo e gli intellettuai*, Bari 1974.)

11. K. Kautsky, pp. 185–6.

12. A. Przeworski, 'Proletariat into a Class. The Process of Class Formation from Karl Kautsky's *The Class Struggle* to Recent Controversies', *Politics and Society*, 7, 1977.

13. For example, at the 1893 Cologne Congress of the SPD, Legien protested against statements by *Vorwärts* according to which 'the struggle for political power remains the most important at every moment, while the economic struggle always finds the workers deeply divided, and the more hopeless the situation is, the more acute and damaging the division becomes. Small-scale struggle would also certainly have its advantages, but these would be of secondary importance for the final objective of the party.' Legien asked: 'Are these arguments from a party organ adequate to attract indifferent workers to the movement? I seriously doubt it.' Quoted from N. Benvenuti's anthology of documents on the relationship between party and trade unions, *Partito e Sindacati in Germania: 1880–1914*, Milan 1981, pp. 70–1.

14. This way of approaching the problem of class unity, according to which deviations from a paradigm are conceptualized in terms of contingent 'obstacles' and 'impediments' to its full validity, continues to dominate certain historiographical traditions. Mike Davis, for example, in a stimulating and highly interesting article ('Why the US Working Class is Different', *New Left Review* 123, Sept.–Oct. 1980), while showing the specificities of the formation of the American working class, conceptualizes these as deviations from a normal pattern which, at some moment of history, will eventually impose itself.

15. We must make clear that when we speak of 'fragmentation' or 'dispersion', it is always with reference to a discourse which postulates the unity of the dispersed and fragmented elements. If these 'elements' are considered without reference to any discourse, the application to them of terms such as 'dispersion' or 'fragmentation' lacks any meaning whatsoever.

16. A. Labriola, *Saggi sul materialismo storico*, Rome 1968, p. 302.

17. Kautsky's main writings on this matter are contained in the anthology by Benvenuti, *Partito e Sindacati*.

18. 'The nature of the trade unions is not therefore defined from the beginning. They may become an instrument of class struggle, but they may also become a fetter on it.' Kautsky in Benvenuti, p. 186.

19. 'The party seeks . . . to reach a final objective which once and for all does away with capitalist exploitation. With regard to this final objective, trade union activity, despite its importance and indispensability, can well be defined as a labour of Sisyphus, not in the sense of useless work, but of work which is never concluded and

has always to be begun again. It follows from all this that where a strong social-democratic party exists and has to be reckoned with, it has a greater possibility than the trade unions to establish the necessary line for the class struggle, and hence to indicate the direction which individual proletarian organizations not directly belonging to the party should take. In this way the indispensable unity of the class struggle can be safeguarded.' Kautsky in Benvenuti, p. 195.

20. Cf. Lucio Colletti's remarks in *Framonto dell'ideologia*, Rome 1980, pp. 173-76. Jacques Monod argues in *Le hasard et la nécessité* (Paris 1970, pp. 46-7): 'In trying to base upon the laws of nature the edifice of their social doctrines, Marx and Engels also had to make a more clear and deliberate use of the "animist projection" than Spencer had done . . . Hegel's postulate that the more general laws which govern the universe in its evolution are of a dialectical order, finds its place within a system which does not recognize any permanent reality other than mind . . . But to preserve these subjective "laws" as such, so as to make them rule a purely material universe, is to carry out the animist projection in all its clarity, with all its consequences, starting with the abandonment of the postulate of objectivity.'

21. This does not contradict our earlier assertion that for Kautsky immediate material interests cannot constitute the unity and identity of the class. The point here is that the 'scientific' instance, as a separate moment, determines the totality of implications of the workers' insertion into the productive process. Science, therefore, recognizes the interests of which the different class fragments, in their partiality, do not have full consciousness.

22. This obviously simplified the problem of calculation, in a situation in which the clarity and transparency of interests reduced the problem of strategies to the ideal conditions of a 'rational choice'. Michel de Certeau has recently stated: 'I call "strategy" the calculation of those relations of force that are possible from the moment in which a subject of will (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) is isolated from an "environment" . . . Political, economic and scientific rationality is constructed upon this strategic model. Contrary to this, I call "tactics", a calculation that cannot count upon something of its own, nor therefore upon a frontier distinguishing the other as a visible totality.' *L'invention du quotidien*, Paris 1980, vol. 1, pp. 20-1. In the light of this distinction, it is clear that, inasmuch as the 'interests' of the Kautskian subjects are transparent, every calculation is of a strategic nature.

23. Cf. E. Matthias, *Kautsky e il kautskismo*, Rome 1971, *passim*.

24. Symmachos (K. Kautsky), 'Verschwörung oder Revolution?', *Der Sozialdemokrat*, 20/2/1881, quoted in H.J. Steinberg, 'Il partito e la formazione dell'ortodossia marxista', in E.J. Hobsbawm et al., vol. 2, p. 190.

25. See Perry Anderson, 'The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci', *New Left Review* 100, Nov. 1976/Jan. 1977.

26. Guglielmo Ferrero, *L'Europa giovane. Studi e viaggi nei paesi del Nord*, Milan 1897, p. 95.

27. Cf. Andrew Arato, L'antinomia del marxismo classico: marxismo e filosofia', in E.J. Hobsbawm et al., vol. 2, pp. 702-7.

28. G. Plekhanov, *Fundamental Problems of Marxism*, New York 1969, p. 80.

29. This relation between the logic of necessity and quietism was clearly perceived by the critics of orthodoxy. Sorel affirmed: 'Reading the works of the democratic socialists, one is surprised by the certainty with which they have their future at their disposal; they know the world is moving towards an inevitable revolution, of which they know the general consequences. Some of them have such a faith in their own theory that they end up in quietism.' Georges Sorel, *Saggi di critica del marxismo*,

Palermo 1903, p. 59.

30. Antonio Labriola, 'In memoria del Manifesto dei Comunisti', in *Saggi del materialismo storico*, pp. 34-5.

31. With regard to Labriola's intervention in the debate on the revision of Marxism, see Roberto Racinaro, *La crisi del marxismo nella revisione de fine secolo*, Bari 1978, *passim*.

32. Cf. Nicola Badaloni, *Il marxismo de Gramsci*, Turin 1975, pp. 27-8.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

34. According to Badaloni, this is the solution which Labriola should have followed: 'Perhaps the alternative proposed by him was erroneous and the true alternative lay in a deepening and development of historical morphology, which was excessively simplified in Engels's exposition.' Badaloni, p. 27. With this, of course, the dualism would have been suppressed, but at the price of eliminating the area of morphological indeterminacy whose existence was essential for Labriola's theoretical project.

35. Otto Bauer, 'Was ist Austro-Marxismus?', *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 3/11/1927. Translated in the anthology of Austro-Marxist texts: Tom Bottomore and Patrick Goode, *Austro-Marxism*, Oxford 1978, pp. 45-8.

36. Editorial in the first number of *Der Kampf*, 1907-8, reproduced in Bottomore and Goode, pp. 52-6.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

38. On this discussion, and the general politico-intellectual trajectory of Austro-Marxism, see the excellent introduction by Giacomo Marramao to his anthology of Austro-Marxist texts, *Austro-marxismo e socialismo di sinistra fra le due guerre*, Milan 1977.

39. 'To see the process of transformation of capitalist society into socialist society no longer as following the tempo of a unified and homogeneous logico-historical mechanism, but as the result of a multiplication and proliferation of endogenous factors of mutation of the relations of production and power — this implies, at the theoretical level, a major effort of empirico-analytical disaggregation of Marx's morphological prediction, and, at the political level, a supersession of the mystifying alternative between "reform" and "revolution". However, it does not in any way involve an evolutionist type of option, as if socialism were realizable through homeopathic doses.' Giacomo Marramao, 'Tra bolscevismo e socialdemocrazia: Otto Bauer e la cultura politica dell'austro-marxismo', in E.J. Hobsbawm et al., vol. 3, p. 259.

40. See Max Adler, *Il socialismo e gli intellettuali*.

41. 'The peculiarity of revisionism is misunderstood when it is a-critically placed on the same plane as reformism or when it is simply viewed as the expression, since 1890, of the social-reformist practice of the party. The problem of revisionism must, therefore, substantially limit itself to the person of Bernstein and cannot be extended to either Vollmar or Höchberg.' Hans-Josef Steinberg, *Il socialismo tedesco da Bebel a Kautsky*, Rome 1979, p. 118.

42. On the relationship between revisionism and trade unions, see Peter Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism*, London 1962, pp. 137-140.

43. Bernstein's defence of the mass strike as a defensive weapon provoked the following commentary by the trade union leader Bömelburg: 'At one time, Eduard Bernstein does not know how far he ought to move to the right, another time he talks about political mass strike. These *litterati* . . . are doing a disservice to the labour movement.' Quoted in Peter Gay, p. 138.

44. Leonardo Paggi, p. 29.

45. Cf. Lucio Colletti, *From Rousseau to Lenin*, NLB, London 1972, p. 62.

46. E. Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism*, New York 1978, pp. 15-6.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

48. E. Bernstein, *Die heutige Sozialdemokratie in Theorie und Praxis*, p. 133. Quoted by P. Gay, p. 207.

49. P. Gay, p. 120.

50. Earlier we distinguished between *reformism* and *revisionism*. We must now establish a second distinction between *reformism* and *gradualism*. The basic point of differentiation is that reformism is a political and trade-union *practice*, whereas gradualism is a *theory* about the transition to socialism. Revisionism is distinguished from both insofar as it is a critique of classical Marxism based on the autonomization of the political. These distinctions are important if, as we argue in the text, each of these terms does not necessarily imply the others and has an area of theoretical and political effects which may lead it in very different directions.

51. Hence his acceptance of a naïve and technologicistic notion of the economy, which is in the last instance identical to that found in Plekhanov. Cf. Colletti, pp. 63ff.

52. On Bernstein's concept of *Entwicklung* see Vernon L. Lidtke, 'Le premesse teoriche del socialismo in Bernstein', Feltrinelli Institute, *Annali*, 15th year, 1973, pp. 155-8.

53. The sense of our critique should not be misunderstood. We do not question the need for ethical judgements in the founding of a socialist politics — Kautsky's absurd denial of this, and his attempt to reduce the adherence to socialism to a mere awareness of its historical necessity, has been subjected to a devastating critique. Our argument is that from the presence of ethical judgements it does not follow that these should be attributed to a transcendental subject, constituted outside every discursive condition of emergence.

54. Among modern works on Sorel, we found the following particularly useful: Michele Maggi, *La formazione dell' egemonia in Francia*, Bari 1977; Michel Charzat, *Georges Sorel et la révolution au XXe siècle*, Paris 1977; Jacques Julliard, *Fernand Pelloutier et les origines du syndicalisme d'action directe*, Paris 1971; Gregorio de Paola, 'Georges Sorel, dalla metafisica al mito', in E.J. Hobsbawm et al., vol. 2, pp. 662-692; and with serious reservations, Zeev Sternhell, *Ni droite ni gauche. L'idéologie fasciste en France*, Paris 1983.

55. See Shlomo Sand, 'Lutte de classes et conscience juridique dans la pensée de Sorel', *Esprit* 3, March 1983, pp. 20-35.

56. G. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, New York 1961, p. 127.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

58. G. de Paola, p. 688.

59. Quoted by Z. Sternhell, p. 105.

60. This is what weakens Sternhell's analysis (*Ni droite ni gauche*), despite his richness of information. The history presented by him seems organized around an extremely simple teleology, according to which every rupture with a materialist or positivist view can only be considered a forerunner of fascism.