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# Karl Kautsky and the Russian Revolution of 1905: A Debate on the Driving Forces and the Prospects of the Russian Revolution in the Second International

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## ABSTRACT

In October 1906 G. V. Plekhanov sent a questionnaire to the leaders of international Social Democracy, requesting their opinion about the class character of the Russian Revolution and the tactics which followed from this analysis for the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. He received 12 responses, which overwhelmingly supported the Menshevik position: the Russian Revolution was not socialist, at most it was bourgeois revolution with socialist elements; the boycott of the Duma was considered an error and cooperation with the parties of the bourgeois opposition, essential. The exception to this rule was the reply of Karl Kautsky. While Kautsky's answer was cautious enough for both Lenin and Trotsky to consider it as a confirmation of their theories, it categorically rejected the possibility of a coalition with the bourgeoisie, the posture favoured by Plekhanov, and therefore constituted a clear refutation of the Menshevik prospects on the Russian Revolution.

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## Introduction: Plekhanov's Questionnaire on the Russian Revolution

For Lenin and many of his contemporaries, the Russian Revolution of 1905 was the “dress rehearsal” for the 1917 revolution, as well as the moment when the basic groups of the Russian political thought arose and the different tendencies within Russian Marxism began to take distinct shape.<sup>1</sup> This event caused an intense debate on the class character of the revolution and, consequently, on its further course of development (Trotsky [1939] 1969).

Kautsky's main intervention in this debate was his article “The Driving Forces of the Russian Revolution and Its Prospects,” written as a response to G. V. Plekhanov's questionnaire, sent in October 1906 to the leaders of international Social Democracy, formally requesting their opinion on the Russian situation. Plekhanov's questionnaire read as follows:

- (1) What is the general character of the Russian Revolution? Do we stand before a bourgeois or a socialist revolution?

- (2) In view of the desperate efforts taken by the Russian government to isolate the revolutionary movement, what should be the position of the Russian Social-Democratic party with respect to the bourgeois democracy, which, in its fashion, also fights for political freedom?
- (3) How can the tactics of the Social-Democratic party with respect to the elections to the Duma utilize the forces of the bourgeois opposition parties in the struggle against the old regime, while remaining [true] to the viewpoint of the Amsterdam resolution?<sup>2</sup> (Baron 1995, 117–18, 120)

Plekhanov's inquiry received 12 responses. The answers came from British labour leaders (Harry Quelch and Fedor Rotshtein), Belgian (Camille Huysmans, Emile Vanderfelde, and Edouard Anseele), French (Jules Guesde, Paul Lafargue, Edouard Vaillant, and Edgar Milhaud), Italian (Enrico Ferri and Filippo Turati) and Austro-German (Karl Kautsky) respondents (Baron 1995, 118).<sup>3</sup> Partly due to the form in which the questions were posed, which Lenin openly described as a subterfuge and Trotsky ironically described as "ideologically impartial," most of the answers supported the Menshevik point of view: the Russian Revolution was not socialist, but at best a bourgeois revolution with socialist elements; the boycott of the Duma was considered a mistake and cooperation with the parties of the bourgeois opposition, essential.

Kautsky's reply was the only one that Plekhanov did not publish, although Kautsky published it in *Die neue Zeit* (New Times), the theoretical organ of the German Social Democratic Party, as a two-part article, and although it eventually appeared in four separate Russian editions, one of them with a preface by Trotsky (Trotsky [1907] 1970, 122–48) and another with a preface by Lenin (Lenin [1906] 1962a, 408–13).

We can imagine the reasons why Plekhanov didn't publish Kautsky's answer. Although the answer was cautious enough so that both Lenin and Trotsky could equally claim Kautsky's support for their points of view, it was categorical in rejecting the possibility of a coalition with the bourgeoisie, the position that Plekhanov was endorsing. In his 1939 article, "Three Conceptions of the Russian Revolution," Trotsky exposed this tactic of Plekhanov, arguing that he not only separated the bourgeois from the socialist revolution, but postulated for each of them an entirely different combination of forces and historical moments. According to this stagiest conception, the conquest of political freedom was a task of the bourgeois revolution, to be achieved by the proletariat in alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie. The socialist revolution, led by the proletariat in direct struggle against the bourgeoisie was postponed for an indefinite future, after many decades and at a higher level of capitalist development (Trotsky [1939] 1969).

### The Historical Context of Kautsky's Response to Plekhanov's Questionnaire

Kautsky's reply shows the general direction of the ideological debate that took place as a result of the events of the revolution of 1905. The debate in the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party turned around the question of the nature of the Russian Revolution and its class dynamics, thus posing the question of revolutionary power in concrete fashion (Trotsky [1939] 1969).

Trotsky also revealed the implications of this debate:

The character of the Russian Revolution was the fundamental question in relation to which the various ideological trends and political organizations of the Russian revolutionary movement grouped themselves. Even in the Social Democratic movement itself this question aroused serious disagreements from the moment events gave it a practical character. From 1904 onwards these differences took the shape of two fundamental trends, Menshevism and Bolshevism. (Trotsky 2010, 33)

It is important to remember, regarding these divergences within Russian Social Democracy, that Kautsky was not familiarized with the Russian language and was therefore unable to read Russian documents directly, without intermediaries. As an outsider, he did not wish to exacerbate the differences between the Russian Social Democrats concerning the prospective role of the peasantry. We say that this was intentional because, according to Steenson, Kautsky was familiar with the positions of the main tendencies in the Russian socialist movement, although not too acquainted with their tactical differences (Steenson 1991, 136–37).

Both Lenin and Trotsky invoked Kautsky's authority in support of their theories, showing both his high standing in all circles of Russian Social Democracy and the fact that his reply implied a clear refutation of Menshevism.

Lenin described Kautsky's essay as a "brilliant vindication of the *fundamental principles* of Bolshevik tactics" (Lenin [1906] 1962b, 372–73; emphasis original). In the same review, published in the Bolshevik journal *Proletarii* (Proletarian), Lenin added, "He has fully confirmed our contention that we are defending the position of revolutionary Social Democracy against opportunism" (373).

Trotsky, in his preface to the Russian translation of "The Driving Forces of the Russian Revolution and Its Prospects," considered Kautsky's work as a vindication of his own theory of permanent revolution as stated in his brochure *Results and Prospects*. He argued that, "The development of our thinking in these two articles is identical. I find this circumstance all the more gratifying" (Trotsky [1906] 2009, 580).

Moreover, Trotsky appealed several times to Kautsky's authority, both in the above-mentioned work and in his book *1905* (Trotsky 1971). This is not a coincidence, since Kautsky was the first Western European Marxist to employ the theory of permanent revolution in connection with events in Russia. He helped to initiate the debate over permanent revolution with his article "The Slavs and Revolution," published in *Iskra* (The spark) on March 10, 1902 (Kautsky [1902] 2009). His 1903 introduction to a Polish edition of the *Communist Manifesto* contained an explicit reference to the March 1850 "Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League" and to "a bourgeois revolution that, in becoming permanent, grows beyond its own limits and develops out of itself a proletarian revolution" (Kautsky [1903] 2009, 179). After the outbreak of revolution in 1905, Kautsky also repeatedly employed the expression "permanent revolution" in a series of articles published in July in *Die neue Zeit* (New Times) under the title "The Consequences of the Japanese Victory and Social Democracy" (Kautsky [1905] 2009a). In December 1905, Kautsky published the article "Old and New Revolution," where he stated that the Russian Revolution "promises to inaugurate . . . an era of European revolutions that will end with *the dictatorship of the proletariat* paving the way for the establishment of a *socialist society*" (Kautsky [1905] 2009b, 536; emphasis original). The following month, in commemoration of the first anniversary of "Bloody Sunday," he reprinted the section of his book on the French Revolution that described the policy of the sans-

culottes in 1793–94 as one of permanent revolution (Kautsky [1906] 2009a, originally published as Kautsky 1889).<sup>4</sup>

This will, we hope, help overcome the anachronistic view of Kautsky as an apostle of quietism and a reformist cloaked in revolutionary phraseology back in 1905. Kautsky's main biographer, Marek Waldenberg, provides abundant material to refute this thesis. Waldenberg considers it a mistake to judge all of Kautsky's writings by his ideas after the outbreak of World War I. This stereotypical view was typical of ultra-leftists such as Karl Korsch, who believed that Kautsky's ideas evolved from a crypto-revisionism to an open revisionism (Waldenberg 1980, 898). But this was not Lenin and Trotsky's opinion before World War I. For that, we must turn to the obituary that Trotsky wrote on the occasion of Kautsky's death in 1938:

The attempts of the present historiography of the Comintern to present things as if Lenin, almost in his youth, had seen in Kautsky an opportunist and had declared war against him, are radically false. Almost up to the time of the world war, Lenin considered Kautsky as the genuine continuator of the cause of Marx and Engels. (Trotsky [1938] 1969, 98)

It is important to highlight two guiding ideas for a better understanding of Kautsky's article.

First, Kautsky warned his readers that the 1905 revolution was bringing up completely new situations and problems for which no previous model was suitable. Since history does not repeat itself, analogies between the Russian Revolution and the French Revolution could not provide solutions to the pressing problems of Russian society. As a great Marxist theoretician, Kautsky understood that Marxism is above all a method of analysis, not of texts, but of social relations, and that a hopeless formalism lies concealed beneath the attempt to convert a historically relative remark of Marx's into a supra-historical axiom.<sup>5</sup>

Second, Kautsky supported the idea that the age of bourgeois revolutions was over in Europe. That meant that the bourgeoisie was no longer the driving force of the revolution, and that the proletariat had emerged as an independent class with independent revolutionary aims. Starting the argument assuming this fact made absolutely irrelevant the question of a possible coalition with the liberal bourgeoisie.

This applied to Russia as well, despite its backwardness: a country whose surface represented one sixth of the surface of the planet (5,400,000 square km in Europe and 17,500,000 in Asia), in 1905, had a population of nearly 150 million people, of which 1,430,000 lived in Saint Petersburg and 1,100,000 in Moscow. It also had the most concentrated industry of Europe combined with the most backward agriculture. The tsarist autocratic empire, halfway between European absolutism and Oriental despotism, was highly parasitical, and the military and luxury expenditures consumed a huge proportion of social wealth. Most of the population was scattered in peasant villages, while the cities, originally administrative centres, quickly became industrial centres without going through the experience of the independent craftsmen and their guilds. Therefore, the proletariat developed straight out of the peasantry, with an extremely significant economic importance in spite of its numerical weakness. The proletariat directly faced the comprador bourgeoisie, mostly foreign or tied to the absolutist state's loans, and therefore politically cowardly. This class, that should have been the leader of the democratic revolution, was linked to the large landowners, and even though it hated the autocracy, it feared the proletariat even more. The urban petty bourgeoisie was almost non-existent and therefore

unable to undertake the revolutionary tasks together with the radical and outcast intelligentsia. Descriptions of that time often report situations of extreme poverty, peasant unrest and a cruel subjugation of the national minorities, which represented at that time more than half of the Russian empire's population (around 55%).<sup>6</sup>

Against this background, the agrarian question appeared unavoidable. As Trotsky argued, the Russian bourgeoisie, which was surrendering all the revolutionary positions to the proletariat, also had to surrender the revolutionary leadership of the peasantry. The Russian Revolution could be bourgeois in its immediate aims, but since the leading force of the revolution was the proletariat, the working class would be brought to power by the unfolding revolutionary events, going beyond the limited national bourgeois-democratic tasks (Trotsky [1939] 1969, 70).

### Lenin's Preface to the Russian Translation of Kautsky's Article

Lenin translated Kautsky's article into Russian, preceded by an introduction in which he justified its publication both by the doctrinal significance of Kautsky's work and by the fact that the article was an opportunity for his Russian comrades to evaluate present events through the author's point of view. Lenin believed that Kautsky's analysis could help Social Democrats in Russia to work out for themselves the problems connected with the party's concrete tasks and slogans of the day.

Lenin openly criticized Plekhanov's intention at the moment of elaborating the questionnaire. He described it as a subterfuge because it was designed to get precisely those answers that Plekhanov wanted, i.e., to justify a coalition with the party of the bourgeoisie, with the Cadets.<sup>7</sup>

Lenin translated the article because he thought that Kautsky exposed that mistake and managed to evade the subterfuge. Lenin did not characterize the Russian Revolution as bourgeois, since the bourgeoisie was not its leading force, or as socialist, because it wouldn't lead to the dictatorship of the proletariat. However, Social Democracy should try to bring about an alliance of the workers and the peasantry, because, given the objective conditions of the revolution, they shared a common interest. Lenin considered that Kautsky's analysis was a ratification of the Bolsheviks' tactics. Kautsky explained that liberals wanted political freedom, but only to avoid a revolution, which made a coalition with them impossible. But he also stressed that it was crucial to recognize that the peasantry is not socialist and that socialism couldn't emerge from small peasant farming.

Ultimately, according to Lenin, Kautsky rejected Plekhanov's point of view, which could lead the revolution to its defeat. Lenin regarded as opportunism Plekhanov's appeals to support the liberals and to avoid "tactless actions" that could drive them away. Lenin ([1906] 1962c, 116) argued that, "the liberals and landlords will forgive you millions of 'tactless acts' but will not forgive you a summons to take away the land."<sup>8</sup> Lenin also believed that a section of the petty bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia would act the same way, since they were morally and materially dependent on the ruling class. Therefore, the masses could only rise against Tsarism with slogans that reflected their own interests. Lenin concluded that the liberals' rejection of the revolution reflected their class position and therefore couldn't be circumvented by diplomatic means.

## Trotsky's Introductions to the Russian Translation of Kautsky's Article

A Russian translation of Kautsky's article was also made by Trotsky, to which he added introductions in two different opportunities.<sup>9</sup>

In his January 1907 introduction, Trotsky criticized "some comrades who contented themselves with cut and dried, utopian conceptions about the course of the Russian Revolution" (Day and Gaido 2009, 570). While the introduction does not elaborate on these conceptions, by means of later works (Trotsky [1939] 1969), we can deduce what he had in mind: the characterization of the revolution as bourgeois was politically significant to the Mensheviks because they believed that in this way the bourgeoisie would not react against socialism and pass over to the counterrevolutionary camp. For this reason, they believed that the workers had to collaborate with the bourgeoisie by restraining their actions and objectives to a limited number of transformations compatible with the interests of the liberal bourgeoisie.

In the other introduction, dated December 23, 1906, Trotsky linked Kautsky's ideas with his own point of view regarding the Russian Revolution and the course of action following from this situation, to highlight the similarities between them. For that purpose, he made a comparative analysis of Kautsky's work and his own ideas, and then went further, trying to give an answer to those questions left open by the German author.

Trotsky thought, like Kautsky, that the peasantry had a great revolutionary energy, but lacked the ability to play an independent role. The peasants therefore needed the proletariat as their political leader. The latter, as the driving force of the revolution, would guide the peasants through the revolutionary path.

Trotsky emphasized a particular issue: the gap that would open between the proletariat and the rich peasants after a triumphant revolution, in the course of which they had worked as allies. Trotsky believed that, even though the proletariat would conquer power through a bourgeois revolution, it would not stop at obtaining political freedoms and other superficial changes. It would go forward and finally defeat capital, prevailing not only politically but also economically. Its measures would clearly benefit the poorest part of the peasantry, increasing the antagonism between the rural proletariat and the agrarian bourgeoisie, releasing the former from their passivity and driving the latter into a clash with the proletariat. Trotsky considered that the only solution to that conflict was to spread the revolution to the whole of Europe, to consolidate the achievements of the revolution. Without the support of the European proletariat, the Russian working class would not transform its temporary domination into a long-lasting proletarian dictatorship.

Trotsky, like Lenin, didn't consider possible a coalition between Social Democracy and Liberals. He described the liberals' attitude during the 1905 revolution as counterrevolutionary and absolutely distant from the popular masses. Trotsky reaffirmed the importance of the urban proletariat as the mainstay of the party, but also recognized, like Kautsky, the convenience of fighting for influence among the peasantry, a field in which the liberals could not contend. The peasants had no bonds with liberalism, and those who called themselves their representatives against autocracy in the Duma were members of the gentry; therefore, they could not represent the interests of the peasantry as a whole. Like Kautsky, Trotsky thought that the more to the left the peasants shifted, the less support they would find in the Cadets.

Trotsky believed that, rather than characterizing the revolution one way or another, it was important to distinguish its driving forces, and from that, to determine the path to follow. The mere characterization of the revolution as bourgeois or not did not, by itself, solve the issues raised by it. The proletariat assumed the leading role in the revolution because a revolutionary petty bourgeoisie did not exist in Russia. And even though the proletariat took on that role, many denied it the ability to exert political leadership, hoping instead for bourgeois democracy. But without a leading bourgeoisie, which classes would seize power in its place? Trotsky left the issue open in the introduction, but his answer was clear.

### The Debate concerning the Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Peasantry

At this point we must consider the divergences of opinions between Lenin and Trotsky concerning the dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.

For Marxism in general, the peasantry is a non-socialist class. Lenin, in particular, characterized the peasantry, and the agrarian reform it demanded, as petty bourgeois. However, the Russian bourgeoisie's hostility towards land expropriation drove it to make approaches to the monarchy, seeking a compromise on the Prussian model. Rejecting a compromise with the liberal bourgeoisie, Lenin encouraged a rapprochement between proletariat and peasantry. Their victorious revolution would be consolidated with the establishment of a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry, that would sweep away all the feudal remains, crush the resistance of landowners, the big bourgeoisie and autocracy, and put Russia on the path of "American" capitalist development through land nationalization (Gaido 2013).

In other words, Lenin did not see the peasantry as a socialist ally of the proletariat. He regarded as its socialist allies the Western workers and partly the proletariat of the Russian villages. He believed that victory in the revolution would put an end to the revolutionary spirit of the peasants and that their movement would not be directed against the foundations of capitalism, but against the remnants of feudalism. For that reason he restricted the revolutionary dictatorship to democratic tasks. As summarized by Trotsky in his *History of the Russian Revolution*, Lenin's position was as follows:

From the year 1905 the Bolshevik Party had waged a struggle against the autocracy under the slogan "Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Peasantry." This slogan, as well as its theoretical background, derives from Lenin. In opposition to the Mensheviks, whose theoretician, Plekhanov, stubbornly opposed the "mistaken idea of the possibility of accomplishing a bourgeois revolution without the bourgeoisie," Lenin considered that the Russian bourgeoisie was already incapable of leading its own revolution. Only the proletariat and peasantry in close union could carry through a democratic revolution against the monarchy and the landlords. The victory of this union, according to Lenin, should inaugurate a democratic dictatorship, which was not only not identical with the dictatorship of the proletariat, but was in sharp contrast to it, for its problem was not the creation of a socialist society, nor even the creation of forms of transition to such a society, but merely a ruthless cleansing of the Augean stables of medievalism. The goal of the revolutionary struggle was fully described in three militant slogans: Democratic Republic, Confiscation of the Landed Estates, Eight-Hour Working Day—colloquially called the three whales of Bolshevism, by analogy with those whales upon which according to an old popular fable the earth reposes. (Trotsky 1937, 314)



For Trotsky, in contrast to the perspective of the Mensheviks, which he considered false to the core, the Bolshevik perspective was right, but not complete: “It indicated correctly the general direction of the struggle but characterized its stages incorrectly” (Trotsky [1939] 1969, 73). The inadequacy of this perspective was not revealed in 1905 only because the revolution itself was caught short by the onslaught of reaction. Lenin ([1917] 1964a) would change his perspective in the “April Theses of 1917,” lending tacit support to the theory of permanent revolution.

### The Driving Forces of the Russian Revolution and Its Prospects according to Kautsky

From a formal perspective, Kautsky’s ([1906] 2009b) article is much more than a simple answer to Plekhanov’s questionnaire. As we saw, Plekhanov’s questions were quite simple and could have been answered in a concrete and concise manner. However, Kautsky elaborated his answer widely, going beyond the framework of the inquiry: He enlightened his readers about the Russian situation and illustrated his points of view using statistics published by contemporary Russian authors. The article is structured around five topics:

- The agrarian question and the liberals;
- The shortage of capital in Russia;
- The solution to the agrarian question;
- Liberalism and social democracy;
- The proletariat and its ally in the revolution.

We can consider the first four issues as milestones in Kautsky’s argument, which allowed him to reach the conclusion in point five, where he specifically answered Plekhanov’s questions. Kautsky titled the first section “The Agrarian Question and the Liberals.” There, he refuted the liberal arguments regarding the reasons for the backwardness and decline of Russian agriculture. Both socialists and liberals recognized the existence of that crisis. The agrarian question needed an urgent solution, since the peasantry constituted most of Russia’s population and agriculture was the mainstay of the Russian economy.

The liberals saw as the cause of the decline in Russian agriculture the manner in which the serfs had been emancipated in 1861, because, although there were land allocations, the peasants did not receive enough land and what they did receive was often of poor quality, resulting in an increasingly insufficient production. Kautsky held that those inadequate and insufficient land allocations were not the only reason for the crisis. In other European countries, where the same thing happened when serfdom had been abolished, there had been no similar agricultural collapse. On the contrary, this led to a situation in which one section of the peasantry rose to prosperity and another section descended into the proletariat. Therefore, the abolition of serfdom enabled the development of a capitalist agriculture based on wage labour. But this did not happen in Russia, because it lacked two of the most important conditions (peasants’ instruction and the necessary capital to invest in technology and improvements in agriculture), making rational farming impossible, even for landlords.

In the second section, “The Shortage of Capital in Russia,” Kautsky explained how the way in which Russia entered the ranks of the European Great Powers, within the

framework of the political strategies of Peter the Great (1682–1721), went a long way towards explaining the lack of capital. Russia's wars and arms race with the European powers, where capitalism was already very strong and the forces of production were well developed, meant that the Russian state, the weakest and most backward economically of the Great Powers, had to ransack its own people in order to maintain its position, hindering the development of a strong capitalist class. But since, despite this unbearable fiscal pressure, the tax base was too narrow for the state's needs, it had to resort to loans from foreign capitalists, causing a constant drain of capital out of Russia.

The Russian government tried to apply a policy of industrialization in order to resist the increasing economic and military pressure of foreign capitalism, but again, this only benefited foreigners. They owned the industries, and their profits were largely destined to consolidate their own positions in their countries of origin, rather than to invest in Russia. This resulted in the development of a strong Russian proletariat without a strong local capitalist class, together with an increasing decay of the peasantry, which was the main target of fiscal pressure. Famines were recurrent and devastating, since farmers did not have enough capital to maintain a minimum amount of livestock, not to speak of investing in improvements. This situation also affected Russian industry, which suffered due to the narrowness of the home market supplied by agriculture.

Kautsky was categorical in arguing that the main reasons of the 1905 Russian Revolution were the decay of agriculture and the rise of the industrial proletariat.

In section three, "The Solution to the Agrarian Question," Kautsky rejected the argument that the only way to help the peasant was to increase his share of the land. It was necessary to adopt a policy that would allow farmers to choose more rational and intensive farming methods, to give them better education, and so on.

Absolutism was incapable of adopting those measures. In its demand for resources, the exploitation of the peasantry was carried to extreme limits; schools and hospitals were closed for lack of resources, the railways deteriorated. In those circumstances, the "healthy arboreal slumber" of the Russian villages, its exclusive interest in local issues and respect for the Tsar, had turned into a deep hatred of the autocrat.

Kautsky considered unviable the liberals' proposal to increase the farms' extension through the expropriation of the large estates with compensation. This would not improve the situation, since that compensation would be nothing but a new and heavy tax on the peasants. For Kautsky, the only possible option was the confiscation without compensation of the large estates.

Nevertheless, an agrarian reform without compensation was not enough, according to Kautsky. It was necessary to adopt a series of measures which would impact deeply on property relations, such as abolition of the standing army, cancellation of naval armaments, confiscation of the large monopolies, and liquidation of the exploitation of Russia by foreign capital. Clearly the liberals would recoil before such tasks, because their economic interests would be affected.

In section four, "Liberalism and Social Democracy," Kautsky described the political role of the different social classes in Russian society. Through a comparison with Western Europe, he showed how in Russia they occupied a position and therefore played a role different from those of their Western European counterparts.

In Western Europe, the role of the petty bourgeoisie in the revolutionary movements was outstanding. For instance, in the French Revolution, the petty bourgeoisie in the

towns was the most numerous, the most intelligent and politically the most important of classes. It knew how to take advantage of its role as a link between the proletariat and the capitalist class, uniting them in a common struggle for bourgeois democracy and political freedom,<sup>10</sup> positioning itself as the driving force of the bourgeois revolutions.

But the Russian petty bourgeoisie did not have that strength at the beginning of the twentieth century. Nor did the cities, where it was born, help its development: the Russian cities were few, isolated and had never cut off their bonds with the villages. Fearing the proletariat and resentful against the capitalists, the petty bourgeoisie became reactionary in Russia and could not provide a stable social base for the revolutionary parties.

The Russian proletariat also had specific peculiarities: the capitalist class and the proletariat in Russia stood in direct confrontation with each other as a result of the Tsar's industrialization policy, and in this struggle the proletariat wasn't associated with the bourgeois liberal parties, but it had its own political representation: Social Democracy.

The landowning aristocracy, in contrast to that of Western Europe, where it had been linked to the monarchy and, because of that, had been antagonistic towards the revolutionary forces, in Russia was part of the opposition against autocracy, due to the state policy of exploitation of the country by the towns and the heavy tax burden. In its oppositional role, it was the core of the Cadet Party.

The Russian peasantry had shaken off its passivity by the middle of nineteenth century. Influenced by the proletarian struggle, facts that had previously gone unnoticed now generated vigorous reactions among the peasants. Then the landlords began to fear them.

Kautsky concluded that the more revolutionary the peasants became, the more reactionary would be the large landowners, because they were afraid of losing their privileges. The Liberal Party would therefore act the same way, since landowners were its main component.

Last but not least came section five, "The Proletariat and Its Ally in the Revolution," where Kautsky transcribed Plekhanov's questionnaire and his answers.

To Kautsky, the 1905 Russian Revolution was not a bourgeois revolution, because the bourgeoisie had lost its status as a revolutionary driving force. It yielded its position to the proletariat, and then started to retreat. It certainly hated absolutism, but it hated revolution even more. Its momentum was consumed, and it was satisfied with a limited degree of political freedom, without going any further and trying to bring about deep social and economic changes, because it was afraid of losing its privileges.

Kautsky did not characterize this revolution as socialist either, inasmuch as the proletariat was still weak and needed the support of another class to achieve victory. To this end, Kautsky thought there was a chance of finding a common economic interest between the proletariat and the peasantry, which would make possible a momentary alliance between them. He warned that the result of such an alliance, in a triumphant revolution, would lead to the appearance in the countryside of a strong peasantry on the basis of private ownership of the land, and that this, sooner or later, would open up a new gulf between the proletariat and the landowning part of the rural population.

Therefore the proletariat, as the driving force of this new revolutionary phase, had prospects for triumph, and there were no reasons for it to resign victory in advance. Recognizing that this new phase was a quite unique process for which no earlier model was appropriate, the working class had to try out new possibilities of alliances with classes

that shared with it genuine interests, as an intermediate step in the path to the achievement of its revolutionary goals.

### Conclusion: The Debate of 1905 in the Light of the Russian Revolution of 1917

In the 1922 introduction to the German edition of his book *1905*, Trotsky made the following observation about Kautsky's position in the discussions about the Russian Revolution of 1905:

The debate over the character of the Russian revolution had, even during that period, gone beyond the confines of Russian social democracy and had engaged the attention of the leading elements of world socialism. The Menshevik conception of bourgeois revolution was expounded most conscientiously, that is to say, most badly and candidly, in Cherevanin's book [Tscherewanin 1908]. As soon as it appeared, the German opportunists seized hold of it with glee. At Kautsky's suggestion I wrote an analytical review of Cherevanin's book in *Die neue Zeit* [Trotsky 1908]. At the time, Kautsky himself fully identified himself with my views. Like Mehring (now deceased), he adopted the viewpoint of "permanent revolution" [Mehring 1905]. Today, Kautsky has retrospectively joined the ranks of the Mensheviks. He wants to reduce his past to the level of his present. But this falsification, which satisfies the claims of an unclear theoretical conscience, is encountering obstacles in the form of printed documents. What Kautsky wrote in the earlier—the better!—period of his scientific and literary activity (his reply to the Polish socialist Luśnia [Kautsky (1904a) 2009], his studies on Russian and American workers [Kautsky (1906) 2009c], his reply to Plekhanov's questionnaire concerning the character of the Russian revolution, etc.) was and remains a merciless reaction of Menshevism and a complete theoretical vindication of the subsequent political tactics of the Bolsheviks, whom thick-heads and renegades, with Kautsky today at their head, accuse of adventurism, demagoguery, and Bakuninism. (Trotsky 1971, VIII)

Kautsky's shift from his revolutionary position in 1905 to his reactionary position in 1917 came after his break with Rosa Luxemburg in 1910, which turned around the question of the mass strike. This led to a split in the camp of the defenders of "orthodox" Marxism against Bernstein's revisionism, between a revolutionary left wing led by Rosa Luxemburg and a parliamentary wing led by Kautsky's "centre," which gave rise to the term "centrism" (see the documents in Grunenberg 1970). In a letter to Ryazanov dated January 16, 1910, Kautsky attributed his break with Luxemburg to the need to distance himself from her extremely unpopular image among union leaders:

I was irritated to see my influence among union leaders paralyzed by the fact that I was identified with Rosa; I think that in order to have good relations between Marxism and the trade unions it is important to show that on this point there is a big distance between Rosa and me. This question is for me the most important thing. (Waldenberg 1980, 673)

Kautsky's growing adaptation to the union bureaucracy made him follow a political path increasingly marked by pacifism and reformism, which finally led him to repudiate the theory of permanent revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat that he had defended with such intelligence back in 1905. Indeed he would become the official ideologist of the democratic counterrevolution against the Bolsheviks after 1917 (Kautsky 1918).

This increasingly reformist course was made ideologically easier by certain ambiguities in Kautsky's conception of the state, which set it apart from the Marxist theory of the state as recapitulated by Lenin in his 1917 booklet *The State and Revolution* (Lenin [1917] 1964b). For instance, in his 1893 brochure *The Parliamentary System, Legislation by the People and Social Democracy*, Kautsky wrote:

That the representative system is indissolubly linked with the domination of the bourgeoisie is one of those myths that a single look at history suffices to destroy. The representative system is a political form whose contents can diverge widely. (Kautsky 1893, 90)

Elaborating on this idea of supra-class democracy, he wrote further:

One must be politically blind in order to claim today that the representative system, even with universal suffrage, ensures the domination of the bourgeoisie, and that in order to overthrow the latter it is necessary to get rid of it. Even now it is becoming evident that a real parliamentary regime can just as well be an instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat as it is today an instrument of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. (Kautsky 1893, 118)

The French reformist leader Jean Jaurès had a field day when this brochure appeared and wrote a special introduction to the French edition, emphasizing his agreement with Kautsky (Kautsky 1900).

So it can be claimed that Kautsky never fully grasped the Marxist theory of the state, an impression reinforced by certain passages in others works, such as his 1904 article "Constituency and Party," which argued that parliamentarianism could be made "subservient to the proletariat," thus "completely changing its character" and rendering it "harmless, or even transforming it into an effective weapon of the proletariat" (Kautsky 1904b, 39–40).

Those ambiguities were reflected in Trotsky's obituary of Kautsky. He argued that, "As for Marxism, Kautsky, from the beginning of the war, behaved incontestably like a renegade. But as for himself, he was only half a renegade from his past, so to speak." On the other hand, the opening paragraph of the obituary clearly states:

The attempts of the present historiography of the Comintern to present things as if Lenin, almost in his youth, had seen in Kautsky an opportunist and had declared war against him, are radically false. Almost up to the time of the world war, Lenin considered Kautsky as the genuine continuator of the cause of Marx and Engels. (Trotsky [1938] 1969, 98)

This is confirmed by Lenin's testimony. In his work "Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution," dated July 1905, Lenin said:

When and where did I call the "revolutionism of Bebel and Kautsky" opportunism? When and where did I ever claim to have created any sort of special trend in International Social-Democracy *not identical* with the trend of Bebel and Kautsky? (Lenin [1905] 1962, 66; emphasis original)

We see that in 1905, Lenin rejected both the idea that Kautsky, whom he identified with Bolshevism, was a reformist, and the accusation that his intention was to create a new political tendency with a line different from that of German Social Democracy, and consequently of the Second International as a whole.

## Notes

1. The years of revolution (1905–7). All classes came out into the open. All programmatical and tactical views were tested by the action of the masses. In its extent and acuteness, the strike

struggle had no parallel anywhere in the world. The economic strike developed into a political strike, and the latter into insurrection. The relations between the proletariat, as the leader, and the vacillating and unstable peasantry, as the led, were tested in practice. The Soviet form of organization came into being in the spontaneous development of the struggle. The controversies of that period over the significance of the Soviets anticipated the great struggle of 1917–20. The alternation of parliamentary and non-parliamentary forms of struggle, of the tactics of boycotting parliament and that of participating in parliament, of legal and illegal forms of struggle, and likewise their interrelations and connections—all this was marked by an extraordinary wealth of content. As for teaching the fundamentals of political science to masses and leaders, to classes and parties alike, each month of this period was equivalent to an entire year of “peaceful” and “constitutional” development. Without the “dress rehearsal” of 1905, the victory of the October Revolution in 1917 would have been impossible (Lenin 1993, 10–11).

2. The resolution passed by the International Socialist Congress in Amsterdam, held in August 1904, stated: “The Congress repudiates to the fullest extent possible the efforts of the revisionists, which have for their object the modification of our tried and victorious policy based on the class war, and the substitution, for the conquest of political power by an unceasing attack on the bourgeoisie, of a policy of concession to the established order of society” (De Leon 1904, 96).
3. The questionnaire was published on page 206 of *Sovremennaiia zhizn* (Modern life), no. 11 in 1906. Although Plekhanov lived in Geneva, he was the editor of that Moscow journal, and in this capacity published the questions and the answers he had himself selected (Baron 1995).
4. Lars T. Lih argued that Kautsky and all the participants in the 1902–7 debate on the Russian Revolution (whose documents we have translated in the anthology *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution*), with the sole exception of Trotsky, rejected the perspective of a socialist revolution in Russia and held fast to a perspective which he idiosyncratically calls “democratic revolution in *Permanenz*”—a concept alien to Marxism (Lih 2012). This is a misreading of the historical record. The debate turned around the question of the dual nature of the Russian Revolution, which was “neither a purely bourgeois nor a purely socialist revolution but rather a *sui generis* [of its own kind] historical phenomenon combining bourgeois and proletarian features,” and which “would simultaneously complete the series of bourgeois revolutions inaugurated in 1789 and begin a new round of proletarian revolutions leading to socialism’s international triumph” (Day and Gaido 2013, 402–3).
5. “The general sociological term *bourgeois revolution* by no means solves the politico-tactical problems, contradictions and difficulties which the mechanics of a given bourgeois revolution throw up” (Trotsky 2010, 75).
6. In 1897, less than 13% of the population of European Russia lived in towns, as against 41% in France, 54% in Germany, and 77% in Great Britain. Peasants still comprised some four fifths of the total population. According to the 1897 census, only 25% of men and 10% of women outside the cities were literate. According to official statistics, a total of 2.2 million workers were employed in mining and manufacturing industries in 1900. If one includes those not subject to the factory inspectorate, a figure of approximately two and a half million is obtained. To this one may add another half a million employed in transport and approximately 300,000 building operatives in urban areas, making 3.3 million in all. This represented 2.5% of the total population of 129 million in 1897. Prior to 1906 any independent labour organization, such as a trade union, was expressly forbidden by law. Until 1905, a strike, even if unorganized, was also a penal offence, for which those held responsible could be detained for a period of eight months (Keep 1963, 1–10).
7. The democratic constitutional party (popularly known as Cadets, by its initials in Russian) was created in October 1905 and its principal leader was Pavel Miliukov. To their right stood another bourgeois party, the “Union of October” or “Octobrists,” led by Alexander Guchkov and created after the Tsar promised, in his “October 1905 Manifesto,” to create a constitutional monarchy and organize elections to the State Duma.

8. This paragraph included in Trotsky's article "Three Conceptions of the Russian Revolution," shows the coincidence between Lenin and Trotsky on this issue. Both believed that not only landlords but also the most prominent members of the bourgeoisie would oppose the revolution, since both shared common interests as exploiters linked through the banking system (Trotsky [1939] 1969).
9. These forewords appear in English translation in *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution: The Documentary Record* (Day and Gaido 2009, 570–80).
10. One of Kautsky's more general arguments however (cf. Parliamentaryism) is that the petty bourgeoisie was pushing radically for a democracy with which the bourgeoisie could not cope, which might throw into question use of the terms "bourgeois democracy" and "bourgeois democratic tasks": i.e., that the bourgeoisie was (and is) not particularly interested in democracy at all.

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