

## The Second International and Insurrection

Armed insurrection, as one of the forms taken by the class struggle of the proletariat, is central to the system of Marx and Engels. The utilization of this form by the proletariat, at a determinate historical stage in the evolution of the class struggle in any given country, is an absolute, an inexorable necessity. This necessity derives immediately from the entire Marxist conception of the development of Society; of the revolutionary role of violence in history; of the role of the State, as the instrument of a single class's domination; and finally of the dictatorship of the proletariat. *Denial of the inexorable necessity for armed insurrection or, more generally, for armed struggle against the ruling classes on the part of the proletariat, means automatically denial of the class struggle as a whole. It means denial of the very foundations of revolutionary Marxism and its reduction to an odious doctrine of non-resistance.*

Refusal to recognize the dictatorship of the proletariat as the only possible transition from capitalism to socialism amounts in practice to a refusal to accept proletarian revolution in general. All the other conceptions which strive to prove the possibility, and necessity, of a different path – non-violent, i.e. non-revolutionary – from capitalism to socialism deny the historic role of the proletariat as the vanguard of society; they confine the proletariat to a subordinate position *vis-à-vis* the other classes.

Basing himself on the doctrine of Marx and Engels, Lenin wrote works of genius (in particular his remarkable *State and Revolution*) which proved the unshakeable truth of these key propositions of revolutionary Marxism: propositions which have been systematically ignored, distorted and rendered unrecognizable by the opportunists. On the other hand, the history and the shameful ideological collapse of the Second International, and most notably of German social democracy, together with the latter's stance on those basic questions of scientific socialism (the State, dictatorship of the proletariat,

insurrection), have confirmed categorically and in practice the propositions of Marx and Engels: propositions defended and supplemented on the basis of new historical facts by Lenin.

As is well-known, German social democracy played the principal role in propagating opportunistic deformations of Marxism on the following key issues: dictatorship of the proletariat; the armed struggle for power; destruction of the bourgeois State and establishment upon its ruins of a proletarian government apparatus – just as it did on every other issue of principle in revolutionary Marxism. For Marx, ‘Force, throughout history, has always served as midwife for the old order pregnant with a new order’; ‘Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other . . . in which the State can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat’;<sup>1</sup> ‘The revolution is an act in which one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part with the help of rifles, bayonets and cannons . . . and in which the victorious party is of necessity obliged to maintain its dominance through the fear which its weapons inspire in the reactionaries.’<sup>2</sup> According to Marx, ‘the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie lays the foundation for the sway of the proletariat’,<sup>3</sup> and ‘One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz. that the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery, and wield it for its own purposes’,<sup>4</sup> but must ‘smash it, and this is the preliminary condition for every real people’s revolution on the continent’.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, German social democracy, now as always, defends the following proposition: that the passage from the capitalist order to the socialist order will be achieved by pacific means, without bloodshed, without destruction of the bourgeois governmental apparatus, without installing the dictatorship of the proletariat.

In 1875, German social democracy, in its draft programme on the question of the State, ignored the experience of the Paris Commune and the judgement delivered upon it by Marx. It advocated not the dictatorship of the proletariat (and the need for a violent overthrow of

<sup>1</sup> Marx/Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. II, p. 32, in *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (Marx).

<sup>2</sup> Marx/Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. I, p. 639, in *On Authority* (Engels).

<sup>3</sup> Marx/Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. I, p. 45, in *The Communist Manifesto*.

<sup>4</sup> Marx/Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. I, p. 22, in the Preface to the 1872 edition of *The Communist Manifesto*.

<sup>5</sup> Marx/Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. II, p. 463, in Marx’s letter to Kugelmann, 12 April 1871.

the old state machine of the bourgeoisie), but 'a free people's State which must replace the existing Prussian State based on class domination'. It is well known that Marx and above all Engels poured scorn on this article of the Gotha programme. They called it 'chatter', 'to be rejected, especially after the Paris Commune', and added that to speak of a free people's State was 'pure nonsense'.<sup>6</sup>

Naturally, with so radically false a conception of the nature of the State, the Gotha programme avoided posing the questions of proletarian dictatorship and of armed struggle to install that dictatorship.

These problems were not posed either in the Second International's gospel, the Erfurt programme of 1891. Nor is there a word in it about the dictatorship of the proletariat, nor even about the democratic republic, that 'last governmental form of bourgeois society, under which the final struggle will unfold' (Marx.)

In 1892 Kautsky, that apostle of the Second International, in what was the official commentary on the Erfurt programme, tried to pose the problem of the transition from one social order to another. But he resolved it in a profoundly opportunist spirit:

This revolution (i.e. the seizure of political power by the proletariat) may take the most diverse forms, depending on the conditions in which it occurs. *It is in no way inseparable from violence and bloodshed.*

We have already seen cases, in the history of the world, of ruling classes who were intelligent enough, weak enough or cowardly enough to surrender voluntarily in the face of necessity.<sup>7</sup>

The opportunist position of German social democracy on the question of how power would pass from the bourgeoisie to the proletariat can here be seen emerging clearly. Kautsky, and social democracy in general, do not at all conceive that transition as the result of a class struggle, which at a certain juncture is transformed into a bitter armed struggle of the oppressed classes against the bourgeoisie and the ruling classes. They do not at all conceive it as the dictatorship of the proletariat. They conceive it as the culmination of a peaceful and orderly evolution, of a voluntary surrender of its social positions by the bourgeoisie.

As to which concrete cases in world history Kautsky is speaking of, that is something nobody knows. He himself does not tell us, and could not do so, since he knows very well that world history has seen

<sup>6</sup> Marx/Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. II, p. 42, in Engels's letter to Bebel, 18-28 March 1875.

<sup>7</sup> Kautsky, *The Erfurt Programme*. Neuberg's emphasis.

no case of a ruling class voluntarily surrendering to necessity. Experience teaches us the contrary: no social order, and no class embodying such an order, has ever voluntarily given way to a new ascendant class, or abandoned the arena of history without a bitter struggle.

A characteristic statement of this opportunistic viewpoint was made by Wilhelm Liebknecht, at the Erfurt congress: 'What is revolutionary is not the means, but the ends. Violence has always, since the beginning of time, been a reactionary factor.'<sup>8</sup>

In his new book *The Materialist Conception of History* Kautsky writes on the subject of armed struggle and strikes:

When you have a democratic State (the existing bourgeois State), a consolidated democracy, armed struggle no longer plays any role in the solution of social conflicts. These conflicts are resolved by peaceful means, by propaganda and the vote. Even the mass strike, as a means of pressure by the working class, is of decreasing utility.

So this is Kautsky's 'road to power'! So this is his thinking on the armed struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, and on strikes as a form of the class struggle and a means of solving social conflicts in the modern capitalist states! It is the opposite of Marx's principles on the same question.

But Kautsky does not confine himself to denying the need for the proletariat to use violence against its class enemies. He confidently asserts that the bourgeoisie itself will not resort to armed struggle against the proletariat:

With the rapid development of industry, it is not military means but economic processes which, increasingly, become decisive in the affairs of the State.

The capitalists do not dominate the masses as the feudalists used to, through their military superiority. . . . They have kept power until now thanks to their wealth and the importance of the economic functions in the existing productive process. They will keep it so long as the masses who are oppressed and exploited by them do not understand the need to replace the capitalists and the organizations which depend on them by other organizations belonging to the working class and fulfilling the same functions equally well, if not better.

Economic necessity, and military superiority, is the weapon used by the capitalists in their struggle against a democratic régime of the toiling classes.<sup>9</sup>

After this 'theoretical' statement on the source of the bourgeoisie's power, Kautsky asserts that the bourgeoisie will not put up any armed

<sup>8</sup> Quoted from the article *Souvenirs d'Engels*, by Charles Rappoport, in *Annales du marxisme*.

<sup>9</sup> *The Materialist Conception of History*.

resistance at the moment in which the means of production pass from its own hands into those of democracy.

The Heidelberg programme, adopted by German social democracy in 1925, sanctions the *de facto* stance of social democracy with respect to the State – the stance *vis-à-vis* the bourgeois republic which has characterized it ever since the revolution of November 1918, and which it still maintains. Social democracy sees the republican régime of today (in Germany and in many other countries – Austria, Switzerland, etc.) as a transitional stage leading to socialism; it therefore categorically takes up the defence of this régime. The experience of the war and of the post-war period has shown only too clearly that the leaders of German social democracy are prepared to make literally any sacrifice in defending the bourgeois republic against the revolutionary proletariat. They accept the role of watch-dog with enthusiasm and fill it with the greatest zeal.

The arguments on violence used by Kautsky in 1892 and 1926 or Liebknecht in 1891, and those used by the other social democratic theoreticians (like T. Haubach today) are as alike as two peas. Haubach declares gravely:

There is a connection between the end and the means, as Jesuit wisdom claims. Every means is at the same time an end, said Hegel, and the wisdom of nations holds that it is impossible to use the devil to drive out the devil. Hence the problem of violence, in each phase of evolution, depends on the idea one has of the final goal of socialism. If one believes that this final goal, socialism, involves the absence of violence as its absolute condition, then, in all cases, one will be obliged to observe the principle of non-violence . . . in order to attain this final goal.<sup>10</sup>

Today, you will no longer find a single social democrat theoretician, even among the so-called left social democrats, who does not align himself with the above-quoted formulæ of Kautsky and the other social democratic leaders.

Even if certain social democrats – like Julius Deutsch<sup>11</sup> in Austria, the left social democrat Bruno Kalninsch in Lithuania<sup>12</sup> and others – in

<sup>10</sup> Theodor Haubach, 'Socialism and the Armament Question' in *Die Gesellschaft*, no. 2, vol. III, p. 122.

<sup>11</sup> See Julius Deutsch: *Armed force and Social-democracy*. Deutsch points out that, in certain cases, the bourgeoisie employs brutal force against the proletariat. In such cases, the proletariat 'if it does not want to be defeated without a struggle, must not cravenly surrender its future; it will have no choice but to resort to the supreme weapon of the class struggle, and answer force by force'.

<sup>12</sup> Bruno Kalninsch, *The War Policy of Social-democracy*, Riga, 1928. The author writes: 'The social democratic working-class International at its 1928 Brussels congress adopted a

the course of their theoretical works sometimes arrive at the conclusion that, under certain conditions, the proletariat may have recourse to methods of constraint against the bourgeoisie, this changes nothing of substance. Kautsky and his like will not reproach them with any violation of social democratic principles. The strong words of the left social democrats about the possibility of using violence against the bourgeoisie are necessary; they serve to keep in their ideological captivity those proletarian elements who still persist in considering international social democracy as a working-class party. It is nevertheless clear to everyone that so long as social democracy remains faithful to its conception of the State, denies the dictatorship of the proletariat, and sees the bourgeois republic of today as a working-class

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military programme which, on the subject of limiting armaments, demands: i) a ban on chemical and bacteriological warfare; ii) limited quotas for heavy artillery, tanks, aeroplanes and naval forces; iii) reductions in war budgets; iv) international control of the manufacture and sale of arms; v) the suppression of penalties for publishing information on secret weapons. These decisions to be enacted by means of international agreements between all countries. Control of them to be entrusted to the League of Nations.

“The International considers that “the campaign for international limitation of armaments will only be successful to the extent that we are able to achieve solutions to international conflicts by peaceful means.” To this end, the International demands “*that all international conflicts be referred to arbitration tribunals*”. The League of Nations must work out an arbitration treaty which will apply equally to all, and to which *all* governments will rally.

“The International requires all socialist parties to obtain a *law forbidding any declaration of mobilization* before the conflict in question has been submitted to the League of Nations for peaceful resolution. Against governments which refused to submit international conflicts to the arbitration tribunals and resorted to war, the International recommends using the most categorical means “without excluding even the use of violent struggle and of revolutionary methods”.’

This then is the attitude of the Second International on the question of war and disarmament. It is not against war, but merely against chemical and bacteriological warfare; it is not for general disarmament, but merely for the limitation of armaments. War in general is permissible and possible, if it is authorized by the League of the imperialist nations. As for the threats of Kalmnisch and Deutsch about the utilization of revolutionary methods against bourgeois governments, these are simply a joke. The notorious resolutions of the congresses of Stuttgart and Basle in 1907 and 1912 were more revolutionary than the present grand gestures of social democracy; nevertheless they turned out to be no more than a scrap of paper at the outbreak of the 1914–18 imperialist war. Let us remember the wars in Morocco and Syria, the imperialist interventions in the USSR and in China, that of the United States in Latin America. Let us remember too the many proletarian insurrections which have occurred in numerous countries, the workers’ strikes, and the role and behaviour of social democracy in these events; then we shall see the hypocrisy of the left leaders on the questions of war, disarmament and revolutionary struggle against the bourgeoisie.

conquest, to be defended against enemies both within (the revolutionary proletariat) and without, *there can be no question for social democracy of ever in fact calling the toiling masses to arms to overthrow the bourgeoisie.*

The authors of scientific socialism did not betray their principles on the role of violence or on that of proletarian insurrection. It is a legend that Engels, in the preface to Marx's *Civil War in France* which he wrote just before he died in 1895, betrayed his former ideas on insurrection, renounced the methods of 1848 and 1871 and advocated peaceful evolution. This legend has been put about by the reformists of German social democracy for thirty years. But now that Ryazanov has succeeded in obtaining from Bernstein the authentic Engels text, it will no longer deceive anybody.

It is now known that the Social Democratic Party Central Committee editors, when they published Engels's preface, cut out all passages alluding either to the historic goals of German revolutionaries towards 1895 (mobilization and revolutionary education of the masses, organization and education of the Party, etc.), or to the need in the future to utilize armed struggle for the conquest of power.

Engels's true ideas on the use of violence are to be found in a passage of a letter he wrote to Lafargue on 3 April 1895, in which he protests vigorously against the distortion of his preface to Marx's book. This is what he wrote:

Liebknrecht has just played me a nice trick. He has taken from my *Introduction* to Marx's articles on France of 1848–50 everything that could serve him to defend the tactics of *peace at any price and of opposition to force and violence*, which it has pleased him for some time now to preach, especially at present when coercive laws are being prepared in Berlin. But I am preaching these tactics only *for the Germany of today*, and even then *with an important proviso*. In France, Belgium, Italy and Austria these tactics could not be followed in their entirety and in Germany they may become inapplicable tomorrow.<sup>13</sup>

Engels' preface – as we know today thanks to the endeavours of Ryazanov – was stripped, for instance, of the following paragraph, which typifies the author's ideas on street combat:

Does that mean that in the future street fighting will no longer play any role? Certainly not. It only means that the conditions since 1848 have become far more unfavourable for civilian fighters and far more favourable for the military. In future, street fighting can, therefore, be victorious only if this disadvantageous situation is compensated by other factors. Accordingly, it will occur more seldom

<sup>13</sup> Marx/Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 568. Engels's emphasis.

in the beginning of a great revolution than in its further progress, and will have to be undertaken with greater forces. *These, however, may then well prefer, as in the whole great French Revolution or on September 4 and October 31 1870, in Paris, the open attack to the passive barricade tactics.*<sup>14</sup>

This passage from Engels's preface, cut out by Bernstein before publication, together with the extract quoted above from the letter to Lafargue, constitute a crushing indictment of the entire ruling faction of German social democracy, and above all of Bernstein who intended in this way to present Engels, in the eyes of the Party and the entire proletariat, as a petty bourgeois revolutionary repenting the revolutionary sins of his youth.

On this subject, it is interesting to quote another little-known passage in Marx, which highlights his ideas on violence and dictatorship only two years before his death. In a letter to the Dutch social democrat Domela Nieuwenhuis, Marx wrote on 22 February 1881:

A socialist government does not come into power in a country unless conditions are so developed that it can immediately take the necessary measures for intimidating the mass of the bourgeoisie sufficiently to gain time – the first desideratum – for permanent action.<sup>15</sup>

The idea that it is possible to scare the bourgeoisie by other means than violence is an illusion which can only assist counter-revolution.

However, German social democracy thinks otherwise. The idea of scaring the bourgeoisie in any way at all never occurs to it. Here is what an authority of that social democracy and of the entire Second International, R. Hilferding, says:

The definition given by Marx (the State as means of constraint in the hands of the ruling classes) is not a theory of the State, in the first place because it refers to all political formations since the very beginning of society. . . .

We socialists, for our part, must understand that the organization is made up of members, of leaders and of an apparatus – in other words, that the State, from the political point of view, is nothing other than the government, directive apparatus and citizens who make up the State. . . .

● On the other hand, it follows that the essential element of every modern State is the parties, for an individual can only demonstrate his will through the intermediary of a party. Hence the parties, taken together, are as indispensable an element of the State as the government and the administrative apparatus.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Marx/Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. I, p. 133, in Engels's Preface to Marx's *Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850*. Neuberger's emphasis.

<sup>15</sup> Marx/Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 410.

<sup>16</sup> Hilferding, *The Social Democratic Congress at Kiel in 1927*.

Such is the definition of the State given by the author of *Finance Capital*. Naturally, once the State is not the instrument of one class's domination, but 'the government, directive apparatus, citizens and parties' (so that e.g. the German Communist Party is 'an indispensable element' of the bourgeois State), it follows that in Germany and elsewhere power belongs not to the bourgeoisie, but to all classes and all parties; that it belongs to all the citizens who make up the State. But if this is how matters stand, there can be no question of combating the State; on the contrary, the aim must be to occupy a suitable niche within it. In practice, this means coalition governments in which social democracy collaborates with bourgeois parties. It means a bitter struggle against the revolutionary proletariat and its vanguard, the Communist Party, which is fighting simultaneously against the bourgeoisie and the social democrat leaders to install the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is the theoretical basis of Kautsky's counter-revolutionary thesis on armed struggle and the solution of social conflict, which we quoted earlier. It means that German social democracy (nor is it alone) believes that it has already achieved the dream it was cherishing in 1875 of a free people's State, and that all that remains to be done today is to democratize that State more fully, democratize the League of Nations, and pass peacefully, without revolution, dictatorship or bloodshed, into socialism.

Kautsky justifies this thesis even more explicitly. This is what he says about the State in his previously mentioned book, *The Materialist Conception of History* :

Since the last declarations of Engels on the State, more than a generation has passed, and this period has not left the character of the modern State unchanged. Whether the characterization of the State given by Marx and Engels, which was absolutely accurate in their day, is still of the same importance today, is something which needs to be studied.

In subsequent passages Kautsky, with breathtaking plausibility, strives to prove that the State in the epoch of finance has an entirely different character than that discussed by Marx and Engels. It is no longer an instrument of class constraint. Further on in his book he writes :

The modern democratic State differs from preceding types in that utilization of the government apparatus by the exploiting classes is no longer an essential feature of it, no longer inseparable from it. On the contrary, the democratic State tends not to be the organ of a minority, as was the case in previous régimes, but rather that of the majority of the population, in other words of the toiling classes. Where it is,

however, the organ of a minority of exploiters, the reason for this does not lie in its own nature; it is rather that the toiling classes themselves lack unity, knowledge, independence or fighting ability – all qualities which in their turn are a result of the conditions in which they live.

Democracy offers the possibility of cancelling the political power of the exploiters, and today, with the constant increase in the number of workers, this in fact happens more and more frequently.

The more this is the case, the more the democratic State ceases to be a simple instrument in the hands of the exploiting classes. The government apparatus is already beginning, in certain conditions, to turn against the latter – in other words to work in the opposite direction to that in which it used to work in the past. From being an instrument of oppression, it is beginning to change into an instrument of emancipation for the workers.

Any comment would be superfluous here. The government of cartel capitalism is not an instrument in the hands of the owning classes: it is the State leading the proletariat to its emancipation!

If one adds to this the shameless attacks on the Union of Soviets in which Kautsky indulges at various junctures in his work; his dithyrambs in honour of the League of Nations, instrument of peace and defender of democracy; his assurances that the ruling classes will not use arms against democracy; if, finally, one recalls the conduct of German social democracy in the post-war period, especially in 1918, 1919, 1920, 1921 and 1923; then one will see very clearly why Kautsky was obliged to revise the doctrine of Marx and Engels on the State in such a crude fashion.

When he discusses the military and economic power of the modern State, Kautsky comes to the following conclusion:

The international standing which the German Republic has now recovered shows that the strength of a nation is determined to an infinitely greater extent by its cultural and economic progress than by the size of its army. In fact, today, in the full swing of democracy's development, a State surrounded by democracies and pursuing no aggressive aims has almost no need of an army to defend itself, once the League of Nations is rationally organized. If Russia possessed a democratic régime and entered the League of Nations, one of the principal obstacles to general disarmament would be eliminated.

The League of Nations, instrument of peace! The USSR instrument of war! The audacity of this could really not be bettered.

The falsification of Engels's preface, the distortion of Marxism in every essential point – all this was necessary so that the reformists could accomplish their dirty opportunist work under cover of Engels's name. The entire practice of social democracy during these last

fifteen years, on which this is not the place to dwell (social democracy has long had its allotted place in the defence-system of the bourgeois order), is a manifest proof of this. Today, everyone can see that social democracy, in practice as in theory, is *against* the proletariat's violence against the bourgeoisie, but *for* the bourgeoisie's violence against the proletariat.

From what has just been said it can be concluded that German social democracy and in its wake the entire Second International, on all the fundamental problems of Marxism, *have never been genuinely and fully Marxist. The genesis of reformism, the shameful ideological decline of German social democracy, started right back in the period of Gotha and Erfurt; it started with the falsification of the works of Marx and Engels on dictatorship, on the armed struggle of the proletariat and on the class struggle in general – decisive problems which form the dividing-line between genuine revolutionaries and all that is alien to the revolution. It is on this subject that Lenin said:*

It is often said and written that the main point in Marx's theory is the class struggle. But this is wrong. And this wrong notion very often results in an opportunist distortion of Marxism and its falsification in a spirit acceptable to the bourgeoisie. For the theory of the class struggle was created *not* by Marx, *but* by the bourgeoisie *before* Marx, and, generally speaking, it is *acceptable* to the bourgeoisie. Those who recognize *only* the class struggle are not yet Marxists; they may be found to be still within the bounds of bourgeois thinking and bourgeois politics. To confine Marxism to the theory of the class struggle means curtailing Marxism, distorting it, reducing it to something acceptable to the bourgeoisie.

Only he is a Marxist who *extends* the recognition of the class struggle to the recognition of the *dictatorship of the proletariat*. This is what constitutes the most profound distinction between the Marxist and the ordinary petty (as well as big) bourgeois. This is the touchstone on which the *real* understanding and recognition of Marxism should be tested. And it is not surprising that when the history of Europe brought the working class face to face with this question as a *practical* issue, *not* only all the opportunists and reformists, but all the Kautskyites (people who vacillate between reformism and Marxism) proved to be miserable philistines and petty-bourgeois democrats *repudiating* the dictatorship of the proletariat. . . . Opportunism *does not extend* recognition of the class struggle to the cardinal point, to the period of *transition* from capitalism to communism, of the *overthrow* and the complete *abolition* of the bourgeoisie. In reality, this period inevitably is a period of an unprecedentedly violent class struggle in unprecedentedly acute forms, and, consequently, during this period the state must inevitably be a state that is democratic *in a new way* (for the proletariat and the propertyless in general) and dictatorial *in a new way* (against the bourgeoisie).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Lenin, *Selected Works*, vol. II, p. 291, in *State and Revolution*.

Since they reject the principles of Marx and Engels on the dictatorship of the proletariat and the role of the State, the German social democrats have *never been able to pose adequately in theory the question of armed insurrection* (let alone resolve it in practice).

If we have dwelt so much on German social democracy, it is because it has always been and still is the moral leader of the Second International. Everything that has been said about it applies equally to all the other parties in that International.