

LYDIA PATTON

# Kant and the "New Socialism"

Economic Pluralism: Past and Present









# The Communist Manifesto

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Class struggle: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat (§1, pp. 25ff.)

Manufacturing and the World Market (pp. 27ff).

The Bourgeoisie as Revolutionary (surprise!) (pp. 28-9, ff.)

Destruction of Local and National Character (pp. 29ff)

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Epidemics of Over-Production (pp. 34ff.)

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# What is Surplus Value?

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Surplus value emerges in the move from local markets and exchanges, to abstract money, to global exchanges of capital.

For Marx, value is the average socially necessary labor to produce a commodity. But the exchange value of that commodity is determined by market conditions.

# What is Surplus Value?

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In the move from local markets to global exchange, labor is commodified in a different way, and surplus value is extracted from the labor of the proletariat.

This arises from two things:

1. The division of labor and class structure
2. The proletariat do not control the means of production

# Class struggle

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"These workers, who are forced to sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity like any other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition and to all the fluctuations of the market" (CM 35).

Their labor loses all 'charm' and becomes 'repulsive'. The lower middle class slips into the proletariat, because capital has no need of a lower middle class (CM 36).

# Seizing the means

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The working classes are faced with a choice:

- Continue with a process that becomes increasingly repulsive and demanding, and with few chances of advancement.
- Or seize the means of production for themselves, and reclaim the value of their own labor.

# Historical Inevitability

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Capitalism is not a political position. It is a *process*. The first revolution involving capitalism is the bourgeois overthrow of the feudal order, and its replacement with the logic of capital.

Given the ability of workers to freely associate under capitalism, the revolution (seizure of the means of production) is inevitable.

Gerry Cohen: "Historical Inevitability and Human Agency in Marxism" (1986).



## Historical inevitability and human agency in Marxism

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# The Consistency Problem

## I

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels believed that it was inevitable that a socialist revolution would overturn capitalism. They express that belief in the *Communist Manifesto*, when they say that the ‘fall [of the bourgeoisie] and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable’<sup>(1)</sup>†. Yet the *Communist Manifesto* is also famous as a call to arms. It encourages political activity to bring socialism about, and its very publication was part of just such political activity. If, however, the advent of socialism is inevitable, then why should Marx and Engels, and those whom they hoped to activate, strive to achieve socialism? How can their activity be rational, if they think socialism is *bound* to come? These questions pose what I shall call *the consistency problem*, because they suggest that it is not consistent to believe both that socialism is inevitable and that it is rational to struggle to bring it about. The present essay purports to solve the consistency problem<sup>(2)</sup>.

# Historical Revolution

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Wage-labour rests exclusively on competition between the labourers... **The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products.** What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable. (*Communist Manifesto*, Ch. 1)

# Political Revolution

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The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.

*(Communist Manifesto, end)*



# Industrial Workers of the World: Constitution

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things in life.

Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the earth and the machinery of production, and abolish the wage system.

# Political and Historical Revolution

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**Historical Revolution** The social conditions that undergird class struggle will inevitably be undermined by the free association of laborers for mutual benefit.

**Political Revolution** The proletariat must seize the means of production. Capitalist state institutions maintain the interests of the ruling class. Thus, it is very likely that the revolution will require force.

# Inconsistency Resolved

"I take it that something is inevitable if it is bound to happen. Hence something is indeed inevitable if it will happen no matter what anyone does. But something can also be inevitable because it is bound to happen not no matter what people do, but because of what people are bound, predictably, to do. One reason, moreover, why they might be bound to do something is that the thing in question is their most rational course."

Historical inevitability and human agency in Marxism

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# Inconsistency Resolved

"And that is the reason that operates in the case at hand; I am sure that the ground of the Marxian claim that the advent of socialism is inevitable is that a sufficient number of workers are so placed that the rational thing for them to do is to strive to bring socialism about."

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The weapons with which the  
bourgeoisie overthrew  
feudalism are now being turned  
against the  
bourgeoisie itself

KARL MARX AND  
FRIEDRICH ENGELS

# Rosa Luxemburg

## SOCIAL REFORM OR REVOLUTION?

- The capitalist state as an expression of class antagonism, versus natural, cooperative economies characteristic of pre-industrial forms of social organization.
- The accumulation of capital as an imperative of the capitalist state, and as a motivation for imperialism and colonial exploitation.
- Rejection of the view that gradual reform of the capitalist state could serve the peoples' interests, and a spirited defense of a proletarian revolution.

*Patton, "Rosa Luxemburg", forthcoming, Women Philosophers in the Long Nineteenth Century, ed. Nassar and Gjesdal*



# The State

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- Luxemburg has a rather Hobbesian view of the state: it is essentially coercive, an institution set up to maintain the interests of the ruling classes.
- Kant, Fichte, Hegel have a quite different view. To them, the state is capable of acknowledging the interests of the citizen, and the citizen can also recognize the legitimate interests of the state: "mutual recognition" (e.g., Michael Nance on Fichte).

# State and Nation

"In the Kantian and Hegelian traditions, the state can embody the moral law and promote individual freedom, and thus is not (necessarily) coercive. In the Marxist tradition, the state is an enemy of freedom, a bureaucratic machine that serves the capitalist ends of exploitation and maintains class antagonisms. (A *nation*, however, may embody the will of the people.)"

*Patton, "Rosa Luxemburg", forthcoming, Women Philosophers in the Long Nineteenth Century, ed. Nassar and Gjesdal*

# Eduard Bernstein

- *Evolutionary Socialism (Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie)*, 1899, eng. 1907.
- "Marx's well-known presentation of his conception of history in the preface of *A Contribution to the Criticism of Political Economy* and the third part of Fr. Engels' *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific* should be named here in the first place as being of the greatest importance" (1907, ch. 1).



# Eduard Bernstein

SOCIAL  
DEMOCRACY

- Capitalism and bourgeois ownership of the means of production is a historical stage that is still productive - this is directly from the Manifesto.
- That productivity can be harnessed to meet the needs of the proletariat.
- If violent revolution is not necessary to meet those needs, then it is not necessary for class struggle.

# Evolutionary Socialism

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- Heavy focus on the 'historical materialism' aspect of Marxism in certain specific cases.
- Argues that the working classes have not yet achieved the intellectual or material conditions necessary to seize the means of production except by sheer violence.
- A violent revolution would not succeed precisely because of the lack of organization of the working classes.

# Luxemburg: Reform or Revolution?

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- Luxemburg argues that Bernstein's thought undermines revolutionary organizing.
- Even if historical materialism makes revolution seem inevitable, political revolution is still necessary.
- This is because of Luxemburg's conception of the state as inherently coercive and expansionist.



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if one admits with Bernstein  
that capitalist development  
does not move in the direction  
of its own ruin, then socialism  
ceases to be objectively  
necessary.

ROSA LUXEMBURG

CH. 1



# The Marxist State

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- "The state is a product and a manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms. The state arises where, when and insofar as class antagonism objectively cannot be reconciled. And, conversely, the existence of the state proves that the class antagonisms are irreconcilable."
- Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, Ch. 1 §1

"As soon as there is no longer any social class to be held in subjection, as soon as class rule, and the individual struggle for existence based upon the present anarchy in production, with the collisions and excesses arising from this struggle, are removed, nothing more remains to be held in subjection — nothing necessitating a special coercive force, a state... State interference in social relations becomes, in one domain after another, superfluous, and then dies down of itself... The state is not "abolished". It withers away."

- Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 301-3.

Now if the proletariat and the poor peasants take state power into their own hands, organize themselves quite freely in communes, and unite the action of all the communes in striking at capital, in crushing the resistance of the capitalists, and in transferring the privately-owned railways, factories, land and so on to the entire nation, to the whole of society, won't that be centralism? Won't that be the most consistent democratic centralism and, moreover, proletarian centralism?

- Lenin, *State and Revolution* ch. 3 §4



**I WAS TOLD THERE**

**WOULD BE KANT**



# The State as Site of Recognition

- Eduard Bernstein and Friedrich Albert Lange organized workers assiduously. E.g., VDAV, Lange as the organizer of a Duisburg workers' cooperative.
- Lange tried to mediate the disputes between Bernstein, Marx, and Engels (Hussain/Patton in SEP, §1).
- *Die Arbeiterfrage in ihrer Bedeutung für Gegenwart und Zukunft*. Duisburg: W. Falk & Volmer. 1865.

# The State as Site of Recognition

- *Like Lenin and Engels*, Bernstein and Lange thought that a workers' state could be built within capitalism and could slowly replace the capitalist state.
- The Bernstein-Lange state involves a Kantian-Fichtean conception of the state as capable of recognizing the freedom of its citizens.

# The State as Site of Evolution

Bernstein adds his 'evolutionary socialist' perspective: the workers must develop themselves into a community to replace the coercive capitalist state with a workers' state (1907, ch. 3).

- Friedrich Albert Lange's account of this is interesting:
- **Elisabeth Widmer**, *Die Entstehung des Marburger Linkskantianismus. Anfänge und Entwicklungen, 1865-1919*.
- **Evan Clarke**: 2021. "Neo-Kantianism, Darwinism, and the limits of historical explanation." *BJHP* 29 (4).



# Luxemburg Stands Alone

Rosa Luxemburg, in *The Accumulation of Capital*, argues for a position distinct from Marx's and Engels's.

Marx's dialectic of production and consumption, and his chart mapping capital, do not account for “means of production of the means of exchange” (*Accumulation*, 99).

# Luxemburg Stands Alone

"Where reproduction on an expanded scale with the two departments (means of production and consumption) took place, a portion of the surplus value had to be proportionately realised. It is here that a third market (as effective demand) — a means of production of the means of exchange — was required and so there was imperial-colonial expansion." [1]

[1] Rahul Govind, "Nation State in the Age of Imperialism," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 51.

# Luxemburg Stands Alone

- To Luxemburg, the capitalist state has an inevitable drive of its own: toward imperialist expansion in pursuit of the accumulation of surplus value.
- The Bernstein-Lange (Lenin-Engels!) optimism about workers' ability to work within the state is deeply misguided, as Luxemburg argues in *Social Reform or Revolution?*
- What is often missed is that Luxemburg disagrees just as much with mainline Marxism as with the Kantian side...

# Upshot: Class War

- Marx, Engels, and Lenin still allowed for the 'evolutionary' approach wherein the state 'withers away' as it is no longer needed, once the workers have organized themselves.
- Bernstein and Lange simply clarify this viewpoint, emphasizing the Kantian-Fichtean aspects of the position.



# Upshot: Class War

- Luxemburg vehemently disagrees, arguing that the capitalist state will inevitably seek imperialist, colonialist expansion to accumulate surplus value - so it cannot recognize workers' interests globally, even if it can locally.
- Thus there can be no international socialism without struggle against the state. Marx's call for international socialism in *The German Ideology* (mentioned in Stefan Sciaraffa's talk) can't be achieved without smashing the state.

# Conclusion

- This debate is often framed as a conflict between liberalism and true socialism. Bernstein and Lange may be cast as defenders of the liberal ideal of state reform, blocking revolution.
- But Lenin and Engels allow for the evolution of workers' organizations which would replace the state.
- Luxemburg opposes even *that*, arguing that class war against the capitalist state is the only way to block colonialist and imperialist expansion - which is just as inevitable as the revolution itself.