ROSA LUXEMBURG

THEORY and PRACTICE



First English Translation

A News & Letters Publication

$2.00

BRITISH MARXIST HUMANISTS
BOX NL, RISING FREE,
182 UPPER ST., LONDON N1

A News & Letters Pamphlet
Published by News and Letters Committees
2832 E. Grand Blvd.
Detroit, MI 48211

© Copyright by News & Letters 1980

ROSA LUXEMBURG

THEORY and PRACTICE

also

"In Conclusion."
from
ATTRITION OR COLLISION

translated by
David Wolff

Translator's Note

This is the first English translation of "Theory and Practice" by Rosa Luxemburg. It will give the American public the opportunity to hear Rosa Luxemburg speak for herself in her confrontation with Karl Kautsky on the crucial questions of the General Mass Strike and on the relationship of spontaneity to organization, as well as on the unity of theory and practice. This crucial 1910 debate in German Social Democracy led to Luxemburg's revolutionary break with Karl Kautsky and foreshadowed the collapse of the Second International at the outbreak of World War I. Also included here are her concluding remarks from "Attrition or Collision" in that continuing debate, where she extended her critique of the opportunism which was corroding the German Social Democracy to an attack on its pusillanimity in the fight against imperialism.

Both articles are from Rosa Luxemburg, Gesammelte Werke, vol. 2 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1972, 1974), pp. 344-77, 378-420; they have also been checked against the manner in which they were printed in Die Neue Zeit. Luxemburg's original footnotes are asterisked; for all numbered footnotes, unless otherwise noted, I am indebted to the Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus.

--David Wolff
April 1980

THEORY and PRACTICE

I

The first question which the interest of party circles demands in our present dispute is this: whether discussion of the mass strike was obstructed in the party press, namely in Vorwärts and the Neue Zeit. Comrade Kautsky denies this, asserting that it would "naturally never have occurred to him to wish to 'forbid' discussion of the mass strike."[1] Comrade Kautsky wishes to misunderstand me. We are obviously not concerned with a veto of Comrade Kautsky's--a single editor cannot "forbid" anything--but with a veto by the "high command" of his original acceptance of my article, which was obeyed by Comrade Kautsky in his sphere of influence the Neue Zeit.

As for the other question--propaganda for a republic--here Comrade Kautsky also denies that he obstructed me. "That would never have occurred to him." All that was involved was one passage about a republic in my mass strike article, "whose wording seemed inexpedient" to the editors of the Neue Zeit. I myself then had my article published in the

[1] K. Kautsky, "A New Strategy," Neue Zeit XXVIII, 2 (10-24 June 1910): pp. 332-41, 364-74, 412-21. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Kautsky's writings are from this article. (Tr.)

Dortmund Arbeiter-Zeitung.[2] "But in vain will one search this article for that passage about a republic." Comrade Kautsky has "not noticed" that I had published this passage somewhere else. "The cowardly veiling of principles with which Comrade Luxemburg reproaches us," he concludes, "is therefore reduced to this: that we objected to one passage in her article, which she herself has voluntarily dropped since then. Such strategy is no piece of heroism, Octavia!"

In this representation of the facts, which places me in such a ridiculous light, Comrade Kautsky has fallen victim to singular errors. In reality it was not at all a question of "one passage" and the possible danger of its "wording": it was a question of the content, of the slogan of a republic and the agitation for it--and Comrade Kautsky must excuse me, in the precarious position in which his presentation of the case has left me, if I call upon him as chief witness and rescuer in my greatest need. Comrade Kautsky wrote me this after he received my mass strike article:

> Your article is very beautiful and very important, I am not in agreement with everything and reserve the right to polemize against it. Today I don't have time to do so in writing. Enough, I gladly accept the article if you delete pages 29 to the end. Under no circumstances could I print this. Even your point of departure is false. There is not one word in our program about a republic. Not out of oversight, not because of editorial caprice, but on well-considered grounds. Likewise the Gotha Program said nothing of a republic, and Marx, as much as he condemned this program, acknowledged in his letter that it wouldn't

[2] Rosa Luxemburg, "What Next?" Arbeiter-Zeitung (Dortmund), 14-15 March 1910. Translated as "The Next Step" in Rosa Luxemburg, Selected Political Writings, ed. Robert Looker (New York: Grove, 1974). (Tr.)

do to openly demand a republic (Neue Zeit, IX, 1, p. 573).[3] Engels spoke on the same matter regarding the Erfurt Program (Neue Zeit, XX, 1, p. 11).[4]

I don't have time to set forth to you the grounds which Marx and Engels, Bebel and Liebknecht acknowledged to be sound. Enough, that what you want is an entirely new agitation which until now has always been rejected. This new agitation, however, is the sort we have no business discussing so openly. With your article you want to proclaim on your own hook, as a single individual, an entirely new agitation which the party has always rejected. We cannot and will not proceed in this manner. A single personality, however high she may stand, cannot pull off a fait accompli on her own hook which can have unforeseeable consequences for the party.

It goes on in the same vein for about another two pages.

The "entirely new agitation," which could have "unforeseeable consequences" for the party, had the following wording:

Universal, equal, direct suffrage for all adults, without distinction of sex, is the immediate goal which ensures us the enthusiastic agreement of the broadest strata at the present moment. But this goal is not the only one which we must now preach. As long as we answer the infamous electoral reform bungling of the government and the bourgeois parties by proclaiming the slogan

[3] Karl Marx, Critique of the Gotha Program.

[4] Friedrich Engels, A Critique of the Draft Social Democratic Program of 1891.

of a truly democratic electoral system, we still find ourselves--taking the political situation as a whole--on the defensive. In accord with the good old principle of every real battle tactic, that a powerful blow is the best defense, we must answer the ever more insolent provocations of the reigning reaction by turning the tables in our agitation and going over to a sharp attack all along the line. This can be done in the most visible, clear, and so to speak lapidary form if our agitation clearly champions the following demand, which the first point of our political program leads to: the demand for a republic.

Up till now the watchword republic has played a limited role in our agitation. There were good reasons for this: our party wished to save the German working class from those bourgeois, or rather petty bourgeois republican illusions which were (for example) so disasterous in the history of French socialism, and still are today. From the beginning, the proletarian struggle in Germany was consistently and resolutely directed not against this or that form and excrescence of class society in particular, but against class society as such; instead of splintering into antimilitarism, anti-monarchism, and other petty bourgeois "isms," it constantly built itself as anticapitalism, mortal enemy of the existing order in all its excrescences and forms, whether under the cloak of monarchy or republic. And through forty years' radical labor of enlightenment, we have suceeded in making this conviction the enduring possession of the awakened German proletariat: that the best bourgeois republic is no less a class state and bulwark of capitalist exploitation than the present monarchy, and that only the abolition of the wage system and class rule in every form, and not the outward show of

"popular sovereignty" in a bourgeois republic, can materially alter the condition of the proletariat.

Well then, it is just because the forty-year labor of Social Democracy has been such a fundamental prophylaxis against the dangers of republican petty bourgeois illusions in Germany that today we can calmly make a place in our agitation for the foremost principle of our political program, a place that is its due by right. By pushing forward the republican character of Social Democracy we win, above all, one more opportunity to illustrate in a palpable, popular fashion our principled opposition as a class party of the proletariat to the united camp of all bourgeois parties. For the frightening downfall of bourgeois liberalism in Germany is revealed most drastically in its Byzantine genuflection to the monarchy, in which liberal burgerdom runs only a nose behind conservative Junkerdom.

But this is not enough. The general state of Germany's domestic and foreign politics in recent years points to the monarchy as the center, or at least the outward, visible head of the reigning reaction. The semi-absolute monarchy with its personal authority has formed for a quarter century, and with every year more so, the stronghold of militarism, the driving force of battleship diplomacy, the leading spirit of geopolitical adventure, just as it has been the shield of Junkerdom in Prussia and the bulwark of the ascendancy of Prussia's political backwardness in the entire Reich: it is finally, so to speak, the personal sworn foe of the working class and Social Democracy.

In Germany, the slogan of a republic is thus infinitely more than the expression of a beautiful dream of democratic "peoples'

government," or political doctrinairism floating in the clouds: it is a practical war cry against militarism, navalism, colonialism, geopolitics, Junker rule, the Prussianization of Germany; it is only a consequence and drastic summation of our daily battle against all individual manifestations of the reigning reaction. In particular, the most recent events point straight in the same direction: Junkerdom's threats in the Reichstag of an absolutist coup d'état and the Reich Chancellor's insolent attacks on Reichstag voting rights in the Prussian Landtag, as well as the redemption of the "royal pledge" on the question of Prussian suffrage through the Bethmann reform bill.

With a clear conscience I can here set forth this "entirely new agitation," as it has already appeared in print without causing the party the slightest injury in body and soul. Although I had agreed (with a sigh, to be sure, but with resignation) to delete the section on the republic, Comrade Kautsky finally returned the whole mass strike article to me. Without altering a word I published the interdicted pages "29 to the end," furnished with an introduction and conclusion, as a self-sufficient article in the Breslau Volkswacht of March 25 under the title "A Time for Sowing": whereupon it was reprinted by a string of party papers--to my recollection in Dortmund, Bremen, Halle, Elberfeld, Königsberg, and in Thuringian papers. That is certainly no piece of heroism on my part: it's just my tough luck that Comrade Kautsky's reading of the party press at that time was as desultory as his consideration of the party's position regarding the slogan of a republic. If he had, let us say, more maturely considered the subject, he could not possibly have mobilized Marx and Engels against me on the question of a republic. Engels' article to which Kautsky refers is the critique of

the party leadership's draft of the Erfurt Program of 1891. Here Engels says in Section II, "Political Demands":

> The draft's political demands have one great flaw. What actually should have been said is not there. If all these ten demands were conceded we would indeed have diverse further means to carry the main political point, but in no way the main point itself.

Engels substantiates the urgent need to clarify this "main point" of Social Democracy's politcal demands with an allusion to the "opportunism prevalent in a great part of the Social Democratic press." Then he continues:

> What then are these ticklish, but very essential points?
>
> First. If anything is certain, it is this: that our party and the working class can only come to power under the form of a democratic republic. This is even the specific form for the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the great French Revolution has already shown. It is surely unthinkable that our best people should, like Miquel, become ministers under a Kaiser. At present it seems that legally, it won't do to set a demand for a republic directly in the program--although this was admissible even under Louis Philippe in France, just as it now is in Italy. But the fact that one cannot even draw up an openly republican party program in Germany proves how colossal the illusion is, that we can genially, peacefully install a republic there--and not only a republic, but communist society.
>
> In any case, for the time being we can side-step the question of a republic. But in my opinion, what should and can be

included is the demand for concentration of all political power in the hands of the people's representatives. And for the present that would be sufficient, if one can go no further.

Second. The reconstitution of Germany. . .

So, then, a unified republic. .

On all these subjects, not much can be said in the program. I call this to your attention chiefly to characterize both the situation in Germany, where it will not do to say such things, and the self-delusion that would transform this situation into a communist society by legal means. And further, to remind the party executive that there are still more weighty political questions besides direct legislation by the people and the free administration of justice before we reach the end. With the universal instability, any of these questions could catch fire overnight: and what then, if we have never discussed, never come to an understanding on them?

We see that Engels perceives "one great flaw" in the party program: that it does not include the demand for a republic, solely on the basis of categorical representations from Germany that, for political reasons, such things were out of the question. With visible discomfort and various misgivings, he decides to bite the sour apple and "in any case" to "sidestep" the demand for a republic. But what he unqualifiedly declares to be essential is discussion of the slogan of a republic in the party press:

You there can judge better than I can here, whether it is possible to further formulate the above-mentioned points as program demands. But it would be desirable that these questions be debated within the party before it is too late.*

* Neue Zeit XX, 1, pp. 11-12.

This "political testament" of Friedrich Engels was, let us say, peculiarly interpreted by Comrade Kautsky when he banned discussion of the necessity of agitation for a republic from the Neue Zeit as an "entirely new agitation" which alledgedly "until now has always been rejected by the party."

As for Marx, in his critique of the Gotha Program he went so far as to declare that if it were not possible to openly advance a republic as the program's foremost political demand, then all the demands for democratic details should have been omitted as well. He wrote, regarding the Gotha Program:

> Its political demands include nothing beyond the old, well-known democratic litany: universal suffrage, direct legislation, human rights, a people's militia, etc. . .
>
> But one thing has been forgotten. Since the German workers' party expressly declares that it acts within "the present nation state," and hence its own state, the Prusso-German Empire . , it should not have forgotten the main point: that all these pretty little things rest on recognition of the so-called "popular sovereignty," that they are therefore only appropriate to a democratic republic. Since you do not feel yourselves in the position--and wisely, for the circumstances demand caution [nota bene, Marx wrote this 35 years ago in the era of Tessendorf,[5] under the advancing shadow of the oncoming Anti-Socialist Law--R.L.]--to demand a democratic

[5] Hermann Tessendorf was Berlin public prosecutor from 1873 to 1879 and became infamous as organizer of the legal persecution of socialists. The Exceptional Powers Law (Ausnahme Gesetz), better known as the "Anti-Socialist Law," was in force from 1878 to 1890; it placed extreme restrictions on association, speech, and the press. (Tr.)

republic as the French workers' programs did under Louis Philippe and Louis Napoleon, you should not have tried to hide behind the . . . dodge [the dots are substituted for a boisterous adjective of Marx's--R.L.] of demanding things which only make sense in a democratic republic, from a state which is nothing but a military despotism embellished with parliamentary forms, alloyed with a feudal admixture, obviously influenced by the bourgeoisie, shored up with a bureaucracy, and watched over by the police.

Even vulgar democracy which sees the millenium in the democratic republic and has no suspicion, that it is in just this last state form of bourgeois society that the class struggle will be fought out to the end--even it towers mountain-high over this sort of democratism within the limits of the police-permitted and the logically impermissible.*

Thus, Marx too spoke an entirely different language in puncto republic. Shortly before and after the Anti-Socialist Law was in effect, Marx, like Engels, allowed--on the strength of assurances from Germany--that perhaps it wouldn't do, to formally advance the demand for a republic in the program. But that today, a quarter century later, this demand in the agitation (and that is all we are concerned with here) should pass for something "entirely new" and unheard of--that is surely something which neither of them could have dreamed.

To be sure, Comrade Kautsky points out that he has already propagandized for a republic in the Neue Zeit, in a manner "totally different" from that in which I, in my harmless way, do so now. He must know more about it than I: in this case my memory seems to fail me. But is more conclusive proof required than the most recent events, that in this

* Neue Zeit IX, 1, p. 573.

matter the essential thing, the follow-up in practice, was not done? The increase of the Prussian civil list[6] offered once again the most splendid opportunity imaginable, and at the same time laid the undeniable duty on the party to sound the slogan of a republic loud and clear, and to look to its propaganda. The insolent challenge of this government bill, following the ignominious end of the suffrage bill, should have been unconditionally answered by unfolding the political function of the monarchy and its personal authority in Prusso-Germany; by emphasizing its connection with militarism, navalism, and the social-political stasis; by recalling the famous "discourses" and "remarks" on the "rabble of the people" and the "compote dish"; by recalling the "penitentiary bill";[7] by revealing the monarchy as the visible expression of the entire imperial German reaction.

The pathetic unanimity of all bourgeois parties in their Byzantine handling of the bill drastically shows once again, that in today's Germany the slogan of a republic has become the shibboleth of class division, the watchword of class struggle. Of all this, nothing in the Neue Zeit or in Vorwärts. The increase of the civil list is not approached from the political side: it is treated chiefly as a fiscal question, as a question of the Hohenzollern family income, and this is dilated upon with more or less wit. But not one syllable in our two leading organs has championed the slogan of a republic.

Comrade Kautsky is a more qualified Marxian scholar than I: he should know better, what pointed

[6] On June 9, 1910, a bill raising the crown donation was passed in the Prussian lower house: it granted the Prussian court an additional 3.5 million marks, placing at its disposal a total of 19.2 million marks per year of state funds.

[7] A government sponsored bill "for safeguarding industrial working conditions" was defeated in the Reichstag in 1899 with the aid of violent mass actions: it had been dubbed the "penitentiary bill" because it proposed the abolition of the rights to organize and strike.

adjective Marx would have applied to this "dodge" and this sort of republicanism "within the limits of the police-permitted and logically impermissible."

Thus Comrade Kautsky is in error when he says I "bewail myself" of being "badly handled" by the editors of the Neue Zeit. I find only that Comrade Kautsky has handled himself badly.

II

And now to the mass strike. To explain his unexpected stand against the slogan of the mass strike in the latest Prussian voting rights campaign, Comrade Kautsky created a whole theory of two strategies: the "strategy of overthrow" and the "strategy of attrition." Now Comrade Kautsky goes a step farther, and constructs ad hoc yet another whole new theory of the conditions for political mass strikes in Russia and in Germany.

He begins with general reflections on the deceptiveness of historical examples, and how plausibly one can, with insufficient caution, find appropriate justification in history for all strategies, methods, aims, institutions, and earthly things in general. These observations, of a harmless nature in their initial breadth and generality, soon show their less than harmless tendency and purpose in this formulation: that it is "especially dangerous to appeal to revolutionary examples." These warnings, in spirit somewhat reminiscent of Comrade Frohme's fatherly admonitions, are directed specifically against the Russian Revolution [of 1905--Tr.]. Thereupon follows a theory intended to show and prove the total antithesis of Russia and Germany: Russia, where conditions for the mass strike exist and Germany, where they do not.

In Russia we have the weakest government in the world, in Germany the strongest; in Russia an unsuccessful war with a small Asian land, in Germany the "glory of almost a century of continuous victories over the strongest great powers in the world." In Russia we have economic backwardness and a peasantry which, until 1905, believed in the Tsar like a god; in Germany we have the highest economic development, and with it the concentrated might of the cartels which suppresses the working masses through the most ruthless terrorism. In Russia we have the total absence of political freedom; in Germany we have political freedom which provides the workers various "safe" forms for their protest and struggle, and hence they "are totally preoccupied with organizations, meetings, the press, and elections of all sorts." And the result of these contrasts is this: in Russia the strike was the only possible form of proletarian struggle, and therefore the strike was in itself a victory, even though it was planless and ineffectual--and further, because strikes were forbidden, every strike was in itself a political act. On the other hand, in Western Europe--here the German schema is extended to all of Western Europe--such "amorphous, primitive strikes" have long been outmoded: here one only strikes when a positive result can be expected.

The moral of all this is that the long revolutionary period of mass strikes, in which economic and political action, demonstration and fighting strikes continuously alternate and are transformed one into the other, is a specific product of Russian backwardness. In Western Europe, and especially in Germany, even a demonstration mass strike like the Russian ones would be extremely difficult, almost impossible, "not in spite, but because of the half-century old socialist movement." As a means of struggle, the political mass strike could only be employed here in a single, final battle "to the death"--and therefore only when the question, for the proletariat, was to conquer or die.

In passing only, I wish to point out that Comrade Kautsky's depiction of the Russian situation is, in the most important points, an almost total reversal of the truth. For example, the Russian peasantry did not suddenly begin to rebel in 1905. From the so-called emancipation of the serfs in 1861, with a single pause between 1885 and 1895, peasant uprisings run like a red thread through the internal history of Russia: uprisings against the landowners as well as violent resistance to the organs of government. It is this which occasioned the Minister of Interior's well-known circular letter of 1898 which placed the entire Russian peasantry under martial law. The new and exceptional in 1905 was simply that, for the first time, the peasant masses' chronic rebellion took on political and revolutionary meaning as concomitant and totalization of the urban proletariat's goal-conscious, revolutionary class action.

Even more turned around, if this is possible, is Comrade Kautsky's conception of the question's main point--the strike and mass strike actions of the Russian proletariat. The picture of chaotic, "amorphous, primitive strikes" by the Russian workers--who strike out of bewilderment, simply to strike, without goal or plan, without demands and "definite successes"--is a blooming fantasy. The Russian strikes of the revolutionary period effected a very respectable raise in wages, but above all they succeeded in almost universally shortening the working day to ten hours, and in many cases to nine. With the most tenacious struggle, they were able to uphold the eight-hour day for many weeks in St. Petersburg. They won the right to organize not only for the workers, but for the state's postal and railroad employees as well: and until the counter-revolution gained the upper hand, they defended this right from all attacks. They broke the overlordship of the employers, and in many of the larger enterprises they created workers' committees to regulate working conditions. They undertook the task of abolishing piecework, household work, night work, factory

penalties, and of forcing strict observance of Sundays off.

These strikes, from which promising union organizations rapidly sprouted in almost all industries with vigorous life, and with solid leadership, treasuries, constitutions, and an imposing union press--these strikes, from which as bold a creation as the famous St. Petersburg Council of Workers' Delegates was born for unified leadership of the entire movement in the giant empire--these Russian strikes and mass strikes were so far from being "amorphous and primitive" that in boldness, strength, class solidarity, tenacity, material gains, progressive aims and organizational results, they could safely be set alongside any "West European" union movement. Granted, since the revolution's defeat most of the economic gains, together with the political ones, have little by little been lost. But this plainly does not alter the character which the strikes had as long as the revolution lasted.

Not "organized" and hence "planless," these economic, partial, and local conflicts continuously, "spontaneously" grew into general political and revolutionary mass strikes--from which, in turn, further local actions sprouted up thanks to the revolutionary situation and the potential energy of the masses' class solidarity. The course and immediate outcome of such a general political-revolutionary action was also not "organized" and elemental--as will always be the case in mass movements and stormy times. But if, like Comrade Kautsky, one wishes to measure the progressive character of strikes and "rational strike leadership" by their immediate successes, the great period of strikes in Russia achieved relatively greater economic and social-political successes in a few years of revolution than the German union movement has in the four decades of its existence. And all this is due to neither a special heroism, nor a special genius of the Russian proletariat: it is simply the measure of a revolutionary period's quickstep,

against the leisurely gait of peaceful development within the framework of bourgeois parliamentarianism.

As Comrade Kautsky said in his Social Revolution, 2nd edition, p. 63:

> There remains only one objection which can be, and hence all the more frequently will be raised to this "revolutionary romanticism": that the situation in Russia proves nothing for us in Western Europe because our circumstances are fundamentally different.
>
> Naturally, I am not unaware of the differences in circumstances: but they should not, on the other hand, be exaggerated. Our Comrade Luxemburg's latest pamphlet clearly demonstrates that the Russian working class has not fallen as low and achieved as little as is generally accepted. Just as the English workers must break themselves of looking down on the German proletariat as a backward class, so we in Germany must give up viewing the Russians in the same way.

And further on:

> As a political factor, the English workers today stand even lower than the workers of the economically most backward and politically least free of European states: Russia. It is their living revolutionary Reason that gives the Russians their great practical strength; and it was their renunciation of revolution and self-limitation to immediate interests, their so-called "political realism," that made the English a zero in real politics.

But for the present, let us set aside the Russian situation and turn to Comrade Kautsky's

depiction of the Prusso-German situation. Strange to say, here too we learn of marvels. For example, it has been until now the prerogative of East Elbian Junkerdom to live by the ennobling conviction that Prussia possesses "the strongest contemporary government." How Social Democracy, on the other hand, should in all seriousness come to acknowledge a government to be "the strongest" which "is nothing but a military despotism embellished with parliamentary forms, alloyed with a feudal admixture, obviously influenced by the bourgeoisie, shored up with a bureaucracy, and watched over by the police"--I find that somewhat hard to grasp. That foolish picture of misery, the Bethmann-Hollweg "cabinet": a government reactionary to the bone and therefore without a plan or political direction, with lackeys and bureaucrats instead of statesmen, with a whimsical zig-zag course; internally the football of a vulgar Junker clique and the insolent intrigues of a courtly rabble; in its foreign policy, the football of a personal authority accountable to none; only a few years ago the contemptible shoeshine boy of the "weakest government in the world," Russian Tsarism; propped up by an army which to an enormous extent consists of Social Democrats, with the stupidest drill, the most infamous mistreatment of soldiers in the world--this is the "strongest contemporary government"! In any case, a unique contribution to the materialist conception of history, which until now has not deduced the "strength" of a government from its backwardness, hatred of culture, "slavish obedience," and police spirit.

Besides, Comrade Kautsky has done yet more for for this "strongest government": he has even wooed her with the "glory of almost a century of continuous victories over the strongest great powers in the world." In the veterans' associations they have lived, until now, solely on the "glorious campaign" of 1870. To construe his "century" of Prussian glory, Comrade Kautsky has apparently added in the Battle of Jena--as well as the Hunn Campaign in China

led by our Count Waldersee,[8] and Trotha's victory over the Hottentot women and children in the Kalahari.[9]

But as it says in Comrade Kautsky's beautiful article of December 1906, "The State of the Reich," at the end of a long and detailed description:

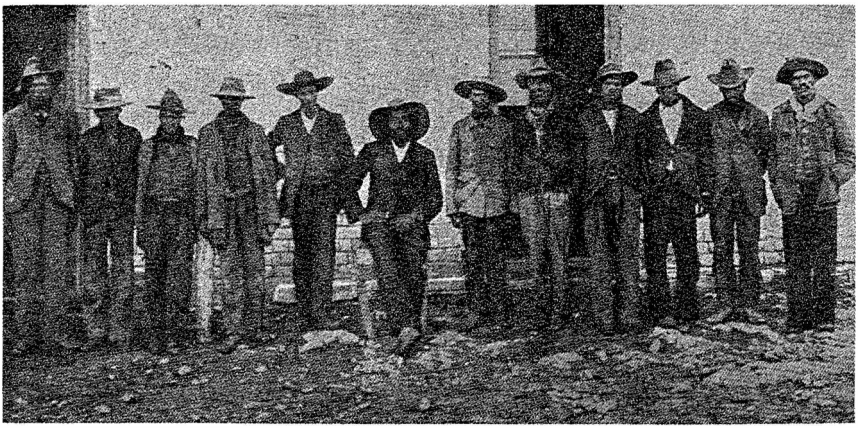
> Comparing the Reich's shining outward state at its beginning with the present situation, one must confess that never has a more splendid inheritance of might and prestige been more rashly squandered . . . , never in its history has the German Reich's position in the world been weaker, and never has a German government more thoughtlessly and willfully played with fire than at the present time.*

Of course, at that time the main thing was to paint the shining electoral victory that awaited us

[8] In 1899 the anti-imperialist popular uprising of I Ho Ch'uan broke out in north China; it was bloodily suppressed by the allied armies of eight imperialist powers under supreme command of the German army's chief of staff, Albert Graf von Waldersee. German participation became known as the "Hunn Campaign" through a speech by Kaiser Wilhelm II to the departing troops of the China expedition, which Luxemburg recalled in her speech of May 27, 1913, "The World Political Situation": "Then came the Hunn Campaign in China, to which Wilhelm II sent the soldiers with the slogan: Quarter will not be given, prisoners will not be taken. The soldiers were to wreak havoc like the Hunns so that for a thousand years no Chinese would dare cast squinting, envious eyes on a German." Gesammelte Werke, Vol. 3, p. 214. (Tr.)

[9] From 1904 to 1907 the Nama, a Khoikhoi people ("Hottentot" was the derogatory Afrikander name for all Khoikhoi) and the Hereros fought a guerrilla war against German colonial rule in Namibia, then known as German Southwest Africa. The uprising ended with the devastating defeat of these peoples, after which German colonial troops were employed against them with the utmost cruelty. Luxemburg analysed it in her speech of June 14, 1911, "Our Struggle for Power." (See Chapter 2 of Raya Dunayevskaya's work-in-progress Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution, published in News & Letters, April 1980.) (Tr.)

* Neue Zeit XXV, 1, p. 427.



Namibian freedom fighters in the Kalahari, ca. 1905. Seated figure is Jacob Morenga, guerrilla leader in the uprising against German imperialism.

in the 1907 elections[10] and the overwhelming catastrophes which, according to Comrade Kautsky, would inevitably follow it--with the same inevitability with which he now has them follow the next Reichstag election.

On the other hand, from his depiction of economic and political conditions in Germany and Western Europe, Comrade Kautsky constructs a strike policy which--measured against reality--is a downright astonishing fantasy. "The worker," Comrade Kautsky assures us, "in Germany--and throughout Western Europe as a whole--takes up the strike as a means of struggle only when he has the prospect of attaining definite successes with it. If these successes fail to appear, the strike has failed its purpose." With this discovery, Comrade Kautsky has pronounced a harsh judgment on the practice of German and "West European" unions. For what do the strike statistics in Germany show us? Of the 19,766 strikes and lock-

[10] Reichstag elections of 1907 became known as the "Hottentot elections" because the Chancellor, von Bülow, campaigned on an imperialist platform intended to brand Social Democrats as traitors. Although Social Democracy raised its total vote count by almost 300,000, it lost 38 seats due to the apportionment of electoral districts and a second ballot alliance of the bourgeois parties.

outs we have had, in all, from 1890 to 1908, an entire quarter (25.2 percent) were wholly unsuccessful; almost another quarter (22.5 percent) were only partly successful; and less than half (49.5 percent) were totally successful.*

These statistics just as crassly contradict the theory of Comrade Kautsky that because of the effective development of the workers' organizations as well as the cartels, "the struggles between these organizations likewise grow ever more centralized and concentrated" and on this account "ever more infrequent." In the decade 1890 through 1899, we had a total of 3,722 strikes and lockouts in Germany; in the nine years 1900 through 1908, the time of greatest growth for both cartels and unions, we had 15,994. So little are strikes growing "ever more infrequent" that they have rather grown four times as numerous in the last decade. And while in the previous decade 425,142 workers took part in strikes, in the last nine years 1,709,415 did: once again four times as many, and thus on the average approximately the same number per strike.

According to the schema of Comrade Kautsky, one quarter to one half of all these union struggles in Germany have "failed their purpose." But every union agitator knows very well that "definite successes" in the form of material gains absolutely are not and cannot be the sole purpose, the sole determining aspect in economic struggles. Instead, union organizations "in Western Europe" are forced, step by step into a position which compels them to take up the struggle with limited prospects of "definite successes": as specifically shown by the statistics of purely defensive strikes, of which a whole 32.5 percent turned out completely unsuccessful. That such "unsuccessful" strikes have, nevertheless, not "failed their purpose"; that on the contrary they are a direct condition of life for

* Correspondence Bulletin of the General Commission of German Unions, 1909, Nr. 7, Statistical Supplement.

the defense of the workers' standard of living, for sustaining the workers' fighting spirit, for impeding future onslaughts by the employers: these are the elementary ground rules of German union practice.

And further, it is generally known that besides a "definite success" in material gains, and indeed without this success, strikes "in Western Europe" have perhaps their most important effect as beginning points of union organization: and it is specifically in backward places and hard-to-organize branches of labor that such "unsuccessful" and "ill-advised" strikes are most common, from which over and over arise the foundations of union organization. The history of the Vogtland textile workers' struggles and sufferings, whose most famous chapter is the great Crimmitschau strike,[11] is but a single testimony to this. The "strategy" which Comrade Kautsky has now set forth is not merely incapable of directing a great political mass action, but even a normal union movement.

But the above-mentioned schema for "West European" strikes has yet another gaping hole--just at the point, in fact, where the economic struggle brings the question of the mass strike, and thus our own proper theme, into consideration. That is, this schema entirely excludes the fact that it is just "in Western Europe" where ever longer, more violent strikes without much "plan" break like an elemental storm over those regions where a great exploited mass of proletarians stands opposed to the concentrated ruling power of capital or the capitalistic state: strikes which grow not "ever more infrequent" but ever more frequent; which mostly end

[11] In August 1903, 8,000 textile workers in Crimmitschau struck for pay raises and a ten-hour day. In spite of state intervention and the decree of limited martial law in Crimmitschau, all attempts to break the strike were frustrated by the determination of the workers, which was strengthened by the solidarity of the German and international working class: but the intervention of reformist union leaders forced them to return to work without any gains in January 1904.



"Out 22 weeks: Fighters for the 10-hour day from Crimmitschau--Solidarity Forever! 18 January 1904."

without any "definite successes" at all--but in spite, or rather just because of this are of greater significance as explosions of a deep inner contradiction which spills over into the realm of politics. These are the periodic giant strikes of the miners in Germany, in England, in France, in America; these are the spontaneous mass strikes of the farm workers, as they have occurred in Italy and in Galicia; and further, the mass strikes of the railroad workers which break out now in this state, now in that one.

As it says in Comrade Kautsky's excellent article on "The Lessons of the Miners' Strike" of 1905 in the Ruhr district:

> In this way alone can substantial advances be realized for the miners. The strike against the mine owners has become hopeless: from now on the strike must step forward as political; its demands, its

tactics must be calculated to set legislation in motion

And Comrade Kautsky continues:

> This new union tactic of the political strike, of uniting union and political action, is in fact the only one which remains possible for the miners; and it is the only one certain to reanimate union as well as parliamentary action, and to give heightened aggressive strength to both.

It could appear, perhaps, that here under "political action" we are to understand parliamentary action and not political mass strikes. Comrade Kautsky destroys every doubt, declaring point-blank:

> But the great decisive actions of the struggling proletariat will be fought out more and more through various sorts of political strikes. And here practice strides forward faster than theory. For while we discuss the political strike and search for its theoretical formulation and confirmation, one mighty political mass strike after another flames up through the spontaneous combustion of the masses--or rather every mass strike becomes a political action, every great political test of strength climaxes in a mass strike, whether among the miners, the proletariat of Russia, the Italian farm workers and railroad workers, etc. [Neue Zeit, XXIII, 1, pp. 780, 781--R.L.]

So wrote Comrade Kautsky on March 11, 1905.

Here we have "the spontaneous combustion of the masses" and the union leadership, economic struggle and political struggle, mass strikes and revolution, Russia and Western Europe in the most beautiful confusion, all rubrics of the schema fused

together in the living interconnection of a great period of fierce social storms.

It seems that "theory" does not merely "stride forward" more slowly than practice: alas, from time to time it also goes tumbling backwards.

III

We have briefly examined the factual basis of Comrade Kautsky's newest theory on Russia and Western Europe. But the most important thing about this latest creation is its general tendency, which runs on to construct an absolute contradiction between revolutionary Russia and parliamentary "Western Europe," and sets down the prominent role played by the political mass strike in the Russian Revolution as a product of Russia's economic and political backwardness.

But here Comrade Kautsky finds himself in the disagreeable position of having proved much too much. In this case, somewhat less would have been decidedly more.

Above all, Comrade Kautsky has not noticed that his current theory destroys his earlier theory of the "strategy of attrition." At the center of the "strategy of attrition" stands an allusion to the coming Reichstag elections. My inexcusable error lay in this: I held that the mass strike was already called for in the present struggle for Prussian voting rights, while Comrade Kautsky declared that our overwhelming victory-to-come in next year's Reichstag elections would create the "entirely new situation" which might make the mass strike necessary and appropriate. But now Comrade Kautsky has demonstrated with all desirable clarity that conditions

for a period of political mass strikes in Germany--indeed, in all of Western Europe--are lacking after all. "Because of the half-century old socialist movement, Social Democratic organization and political freedom," even simple demonstration mass strikes of the extent and momentum of the Russian ones have become almost impossible in Western Europe.

Yet if this is so, then prospects for the mass strike after Reichstag elections seem fairly problematic. It is clear that all the conditions which make the mass strike absolutely impossible in Germany--the strongest contemporary government and its glittering prestige, the slavish obedience of the state employees, the unshakable opposing might of the cartels, the political isolation of the proletariat--that all this will not suddenly disappear after next year. If the reasons which speak against the political mass strike no longer lie in the situation of the moment, as the "strategy of attrition" would have it, but in the direct results of "half a century of socialist enlightenment and political freedom," in the highly developed level of "Western Europe's" economic and political life--then postponement of expectations for a mass strike until the year after the Reichstag elections turns out to be no more than a modest fig leaf covering the "strategy of attrition's" only real content: the commendation of Reichstag elections. In my first reply[12] I tried to show that in reality the "strategy of attrition" amounted to "Nothing-But-Parliamentarianism." Now Comrade Kautsky himself confirms this in elaborating his theories.

Yet more. Comrade Kautsky has, to be sure, postponed the great mass action until after the Reichstag elections: but at the same time he must admit that in the present situation, the political mass strike could become necessary "at any moment"--for "never in the history of the German Reich were

[12] Rosa Luxemburg, "Attrition or Collision?"

the social, political, and international contradictions under such tension as now."[13] But if in general the social conditions and historic ripeness of "Western Europe," and specifically of Germany, make a mass strike action impossible now, how can such an action suddenly "at any moment" be set in motion? A brutal provocation by the police, a massacre at a demonstration could greatly heighten the masses' agitation and sharpen the situation: yet it obviously could not be that "great occasion" which would abruptly overturn the entire economic and political structure of Germany.

But Comrade Kautsky has proved yet another superfluous thing. If the general economic and political conditions in Germany are such as to make a mass strike action like the Russian one impossible, and if the extension which the mass strike underwent in the Russian Revolution is the specific product of Russian backwardness, then not only is the use of the mass strike in the Prussian voting rights struggle called into question, but the Jena resolution as well. Until now, the resolution of the Jena party convention [of 1905--Tr.] was regarded both here and abroad as such a highly significant announcement because it officially borrowed the mass strike from the arsenal of the Russian Revolution, and incorporated it among the tactics of German Social Democracy as a means of political struggle. Admittedly this resolution was formally so composed, and by many exclusively interpreted so that Social Democracy seemed to declare it would only turn to the mass strike in case of an attack on Reichstag voting rights. But once, in any case, Comrade Kautsky did not belong to those formalists; indeed, in 1904 he emphatically wrote:

> If we learn one thing from the Belgian example, it is that it would be a fatal error for us in Germany to commit ourselves to a specific time for proclaiming the

[13] K. Kautsky, "What Now?" Neue Zeit XXVIII, 2 (15 April 1910): p. 80.

political strike--for example, in the event of an attack on the present Reichstag voting rights.*

The chief significance, the essential content of the Jena resolution lay not in this formalistic "commitment," but in the fact of German Social Democracy's principled acceptance of the lessons and example of the Russian Revolution. It was the spirit of the Russian Revolution which ruled the convention of our party in Jena. And now when Comrade Kautsky directly derives the role of the mass strike in the Russian Revolution from Russian backwardness, thereby constructing a contradiction between revolutionary Russia and parliamentary "Western Europe"; when he emphatically warns against the examples and methods of revolution--yes, when by implication even the proletariat's defeat in the Russian Revolution is debited in his account to the grandiose mass strike action, through which the proletariat "must eventually be exhausted"--in short, when Comrade Kautsky declares point-blank "but be that as it may, the schema of the Russian mass strike before and during the revolution does not fit German conditions": then from this standpoint it seems an incredible blunder, that German Social Democracy officially borrowed the mass strike directly from the Russian Revolution as a new means of struggle. At bottom, Comrade Kautsky's current theory is a frightfully fundamental revision of the Jena resolution.

To justify his individual, cockeyed stand in the last Prussian voting rights campaign, Comrade Kautsky step-by-step sells out the lessons of the Russian Revolution--the most significant extension and enrichment of proletarian tactics in the last decade.

* "Revolutionaries Everywhere," Neue Zeit XXII, 1, p. 736. My emphasis.

IV

In light of the conclusions which follow from Comrade Kautsky's newest theory, it now becomes clear how very false, from the ground up, this theory is. To derive the mass strike action of the Russian proletariat, unparalleled in the history of modern class struggle, from Russia's social backwardness--in other words, to explain the outstanding importance and leading role of the urban industrial proletariat in the Russian Revolution as Russian "backwardness"--is to stand things right on their heads.

It was not economic retardation, but precisely the high development of capitalism, modern industry, and commerce in Russia which made that grandiose mass strike action possible, and which caused it. It was just because the urban industrial proletariat was already so numerous, concentrated in the great centers, and so strongly moved by class consciousness, just because the genuine modern capitalist contradiction had progressed so far, that the struggle for political freedom could be decisively led by this proletariat alone. But because of this it could be no purely constitutional struggle after the liberal formula, but a genuine modern class struggle in all its breadth and depth, fighting for the economic as well as the political interests of the workers--against capital as well as Tsarism, for the eight-hour day as well as a democratic constitution. And only because capitalist industry and the modern means of commerce bound to it had become a condition of existence for the state's economic life, could the mass strikes of the proletariat in Russia realize such a staggering, decisive effect: that the revolution celebrated its victories with

them, and with them went down in defeat and grew silent.

At this moment I can think of no more exact formulation of the factors in question here, than that which I gave in my pamphlet on the mass strike in 1906:

> We have seen that the mass strike in Russia represents not the synthetic product of a deliberate Social Democratic tactic, but a natural historic figure on the ground of the present revolution. What are the forces in Russia now which have brought forth this new manifestation of revolution?
>
> The immediate task of the Russian Revolution is putting an end to absolutism and establishing a modern bourgeois-parliamentary constitutional state. Formally, this is exactly the same task faced by the March Revolution in Germany and by the Great Revolution in France at the end of the eighteenth century. But the circumstances, the historic milieu in which these formally analogous revolutions took place, are fundamentally different from those of today's Russia. The difference in circumstances is the entire cycle of capitalist development which has run between those bourgeois revolutions in the West and the present bourgeois revolution in the East. That is, this development has not seized the Western European lands alone, but absolutist Russia as well. Large scale industry with all its consequences--the modern class division, the glaring social contrasts, modern metropolitan life and the modern proletariat--has become the leading form of production in Russia (i.e., the decisive one for its social development).
>
> But from this has resulted a strange, contradictory historical situation: that a

revolution whose formal objectives are bourgeois will be carried out under the leadership of a modern, class-conscious proletariat, and in an international milieu which stands under the sign of bourgeois democracy's downfall. Now the bourgeoisie is not the leading revolutionary element it was in the earlier revolutions of the West, when the proletarian mass, dissolved in the petty bourgeoisie, served as its military levies. All is reversed: the class-conscious proletariat is the leading, driving element; the big bourgeois strata are in part directly counterrevolutionary, in part weakly liberal; only the rural petty bourgeoisie, along with the urban petty bourgeois intelligensia, are decidedly oppositional, indeed revolutionary minded. But the Russian proletariat, so clearly destined for the leading role in the bourgeois revolution, is itself free from all illusions about bourgeois democracy--and therefore it enters the struggle with a strongly developed consciousness of its own specific class interests in the acutely sharpened opposition of capital and labor.

This contradictory state of affairs is expressed in the fact that in this formally bourgeois revolution, bourgeois society's opposition to absolutism will be commanded by the proletariat's opposition to bourgeois society; that the proletariat's struggle will be simultaneously directed, with equal force, against absolutism and capitalist exploitation; that the program of revolutionary struggle is directed, with equal emphasis, toward political freedom and the eight-hour day, as well as a material existence for the proletariat worthy of humanity. <u>This two-fold character of the Russian Revolution manifests itself in that inner unity and</u>

reciprocal action of economic and political struggle in which we have been instructed by the events in Russia, and which finds its natural expression in the mass strike. . .

So the mass strike shows itself to be no specifically Russian product, arising from absolutism, but a universal form of proletarian class struggle resulting from the present stage of capitalist development and class relations. From this standpoint, the three bourgeois revolutions--the Great French Revolution, the German March Revolution, and the present Russian one--form an onrunning chain of development in which the prosperity and the end of the capitalist century are reflected. . . .

The present revolution realizes, in the special circumstances of absolutist Russia, the universal results of international capitalist development: and in this it seems less a final descendant of the old bourgeois revolutions than a forerunner of a new series of proletarian revolutions in the West. Just because it has so inexcusably delayed its bourgeois revolution, the most backward land shows ways and methods of extended class struggle for the proletariat of Germany and the most advanced capitalist lands.[14]

Earlier, Comrade Kautsky also viewed the Russian Revolution in the same historical perspective. In December 1906, in complete agreement with my interpretation, he wrote:

> We may most speedily master the lessons of the Russian Revolution and the tasks which it sets us, if we regard it as neither a bourgeois revolution in the traditional sense nor a socialist one, but as a wholly

[14] Rosa Luxemburg, Mass Strike, Party and Trade Unions.



Russian strike demonstration in St. Petersburg, 1905.

> unique process taking place on the border line between bourgeois and socialist society: it demands dissolution of the one, prepares for the formation of the other, and in either case brings all of humanity under capitalist civilization a mighty step forward in its march of development.*

If thus one grasps the real social and historical conditions which lie at the root of the Russian Revolution's specific new form of struggle, the mass strike action--and another interpretation is not very well possible without phantasizing the actual course of this action out of thin air, as Comrade Kautsky now does with his "amorphous, primitive strikes"--then it is clear that mass strikes as the form of the proletariat's revolutionary struggle come into consideration even more for Western Europe than in Russia, to the extent which capitalism (in Germany, for example) is much more highly developed.

In fact, all the conditions which Comrade Kautsky mobilizes against the political mass strike are just so many forces which must make the mass strike action in Germany even more inevitable, extensive, and powerful.

The opposing might of the cartels which Comrade Kautsky invokes, "searching" in vain "for its like," the slavish obedience in which the enormous category of German state employees is sunken--these are the very things which make a peaceful, profitable union action ever more difficult for the bulk of the German proletariat. They feed ever mightier trials of strength and explosions in the economic sphere, whose elemental character and mass extension take on more and more political meaning the longer they continue.

It is just the political isolation of the proletariat in Germany to which Comrade Kautsky refers, just the fact that the united bourgeoisie

* "Driving Forces and Perspectives of the Russian Revolution," Neue Zeit XXV, 1, p. 333.

down to the last petty bourgeois stands behind the government like a wall, that shapes every great political struggle against the government into a struggle against the bourgeoisie, against exploitation. And the same circumstances guarantee that every energetic revolutionary mass action in Germany will not take parliamentary forms of liberalism or the previous form of the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie's struggle, the brief barricade battle, but the classic proletarian form of the mass strike.

And finally: it is just because we in Germany have "a half century of socialist enlightenment and political freedom" behind us, that as soon as the situation has so ripened that the masses take to the field, the action of the proletariat set in motion by every political struggle will roll together all ancient reckonings against private and state exploitation, and unite the political with an economic mass struggle. For, as Comrade Kautsky wrote in 1907:

> We have not the slightest ground to assume that the degree of exploitation of the German proletariat is less than that in Russia. On the contrary, we have seen that with the advance of capitalism the exploitation of the proletariat increases. If the German worker is in a somewhat better position than the Russian, the productivity of his labor is also much greater, and his needs in relation to the general national standard of living are much higher: so that the German worker finds the capitalist yoke perhaps even more galling than the Russian does.*

Comrade Kautsky, who paints in such splendid colors how the German worker is "totally preoccupied with organizations, meetings, and elections of all

* The Social Revolution, 2nd ed., p. 60.

sorts," has for the moment forgotten the quite enormous slave herds of Prusso-German state employees, railroad workers and postal workers, as well as the farm workers, who unfortunately enjoy very limited measure of that contented preoccupation with "organizations, meetings, and options of all sorts" as long as the right to organize is legally or practically denied them. He has forgotten that in the midst of royal Prussian freedom these enormous categories live politically as well as economically in genuine "Russian" conditions, and that therefore these very categories--not to mention the miners--will find it impossible, in the midst of a political convulsion, to maintain their slavish obedience or to refrain from presenting their special bill of reckoning in the form of giant mass strikes.

But let us look at "Western Europe." In disputing all this, Comrade Kautsky has yet another opponent besides myself to deal with: reality. Specifically, what do we see here when we only direct our attention to the most important mass strikes of the last ten years?

The great Belgian mass strikes which won universal suffrage stand by themselves in the '90s as a bold experiment. Nevertheless, what depth and multidimensionality!

In 1900 the mass strike by the miners in Pennsylvania which, according to the testimony of American comrades, did more to spread socialist ideas than ten years of agitation; also in 1900, mass strike by the miners in Austria; 1902, mass strike by the miners in France; 1902, general strike by all production workers in Barcelona in support of the struggling metal workers; 1902, demonstration mass strike in Sweden for universal, equal suffrage; 1902, mass strike in Belgium for universal, equal suffrage; 1902, mass strike by the farm workers in all east Galicia (over 200,000 taking part) in defense of the right to organize; 1903, in January and April, two mass strikes by the railroad workers in Holland;

1904, mass strike by the railroad workers in Hungary; 1904, demonstration mass strike in Italy protesting the massacres in Sardinia; in January 1905, mass strike by the miners in the Ruhr district; in October 1905, demonstration mass strike in and around Prague (by 100,000 workers) for universal, equal suffrage in Bohemian Landtag elections; in October 1905, demonstration mass strike in Lemburg for universal, equal suffrage in Galician Landtag elections; in November 1905, demonstration mass strike in all of Austria for universal, equal suffrage in Reichsrat elections; 1905, mass strike by the Italian farm workers; 1905, mass strike by the Italian railroad workers; 1906, demonstration mass strike in Triest for universal, equal suffrage in Landtag elections which victoriously forced the reform through; 1906, mass strike by the foundry workers in Witkowitz (Mähren) in support of 400 shop stewards fired because of the May Day celebration--victoriously concluded; 1909, mass strike in Sweden in defense of the right to organize; 1909, mass strike by the postal workers in France; in October 1909, demonstration mass strike by all workers in Trient and Rovereto protesting the political persecution of Social Democracy; 1910, mass strike in Philadelphia in support of the streetcar workers' struggle for the right to organize; and at this moment, preparations for a mass strike by the railroad workers in France.

This is the "impossibility" of "West European" mass strikes, especially demonstration mass strikes, which Comrade Kautsky has so beautifully demonstrated in black and white. Comrade Kautsky has theoretically proved the obvious impossibility of mixing political and economic strikes, the impossibility of impressive, general demonstration mass strikes, the impossibility of mass strikes being a period of repeated hand-to-hand combat. He has forgotten that for the last ten years we have lived in a period of economic, political, fighting and demonstration strikes: a period which has extended, with striking unity, over almost all "West European lands" as well

as the United States; over the capitalistically most backward like Spain, and the most advanced like North America; over lands with the weakest union movements like France, and those with strapping Social Democratic unions like Austria; over agrarian Galicia and highly industrialized Bohemia; over half-feudal states like the Hapsburg monarchy, republics like France, and absolutist states like Russia. And of course, in addition to the above-enumerated stands Russia's grandiose mass strike action from 1902 to 1906, which has shown how the significance and extent of the mass strike initially grow together with the revolutionary situation and the political action of the proletariat.

> For while we discuss the political strike and search for its theoretical formulation and confirmation, one mighty political mass strike after another flames up through the spontaneous combustion of the masses--or rather every mass strike becomes a political action, every great political test of strength climaxes in a mass strike, whether among the miners, the proletariat of Russia, the Italian farm workers and railroad workers, etc.*

From this it almost seems as if Comrade Kautsky, through his newest theory of the impossibility of a period of political mass strikes in Germany, has demonstrated not so much a contradiction between Russia and Western Europe as a contradiction between Germany and the rest of the world--Western Europe and Russia thrown in together. Prussia must in fact be the exception among all capitalist lands, if what Comrade Kautsky has worked out on the impossibility of even short general demonstration mass strikes in Prussia is true. It would be "entirely unthinkable that in a demonstration strike against the government here, commuter railways, streetcars,

* K. Kautsky, "The Lessons of the Miners' Strikes," Neue Zeit XXIII, [1], p. 781.

and gas works come to a standstill," that we in Germany experience a demonstration strike which "alters the entire landscape, and in so doing makes the deepest impression on the entire bourgeois world as well as the most indifferent strata of the proletariat." But then what is "unthinkable" in Germany must be what has already proved itself possible in Galicia, in Bohemia, in Italy, in Trieste and Trento, in Spain, and in Sweden. In all these lands and cities, splendid demonstration strikes have taken place which completely altered "the landscape." In Bohemia on November 20, 1905, an absolute, general work stoppage reigned which extended even to agriculture--a thing they have not yet experienced in Russia. In Italy in September 1904 the farm workers, streetcars, electric and gas works took a holiday, and even the daily press had to stop publication. "It has indeed become the most total general strike," wrote the Neue Zeit, "that history knows of: for three whole days the city of Genoa was left without light and bread and meat; all economic life was paralysed."* In Sweden's capital Stockholm, in 1902 as well as 1909, all means of communication and commerce--streetcars, cabs, wagons, municipal services--were shut down in the first week. In Barcelona in 1902, all economic life rested for many days.

And so in Prusso-Germany--with its "strongest contemporary government," and its special "German conditions" which supposedly show proletarian methods of struggle, possible in all the rest of the world, to be all sorts of impossibilities--we have finally acquired an unexpected counterpart to those special "Bavarian" and "south German" conditions which Comrade Kautsky once so heartily derided with us. But in particular, these German "impossibilities" plume themselves on the fact that precisely in Germany we have the strongest party, the strongest

* Oda Olberg, "The Italian General Strike," Neue Zeit XXIII, 1, p. 19.

unions, the best organization, the greatest discipline, the most enlightened proletariat, and the greatest influence of Marxism. By this method we would come, in fact, to the singular conclusion that the stronger Social Democracy is, the more powerless the proletariat. But I believe that to say mass strikes and demonstration strikes which were possible in various other lands are impossible today in Germany, is to fix a brand of incapacity on the German proletariat which it has as yet done nothing to deserve.

V

What actually remains of Comrade Kautsky's mass strike theory, after he has pointed out all the "impossibilities"? The one, "final," pure political mass strike, disengaged from economic strikes: which once only, but with absolute conclusiveness, smashes down like thunder out of the clear blue sky. Says Comrade Kautsky:

> Here, in this conception, lies the deepest ground of the differences between my friends and me over the mass strike. They anticipate a <u>period of mass strikes</u>. Under the existing conditions in Germany, I can imagine a political mass strike only as <u>a one-time event</u> into which the entire proletariat of the Reich enters with its entire strength; as a struggle to the death; as a struggle which either overthrows our enemies, or smashes--or at least cripples--the totality of our organizations and our entire strength for years on end.

As for this image of the "final mass strike" which swims before Comrade Kautsky, one must first

of all say that it is, at any rate, a totally new creation: for it is not drawn from reality, but out of pure "imagination." For not only does it fit no Russian pattern: not one mass strike of the many which have taken place in "Western Europe" or the United States approximately resembles the exemplar which Comrade Kautsky has invented for Germany. None of the mass strikes known till now was a "final" struggle "to the death"; none led to the total victory of the workers, but none "smashed the totality of organizations and the entire strength" of the proletariat "for years on end." Success was mostly a partial and an indirect one. The miners' giant strikes usually ended in a direct defeat: but as a further consequence, they realized important social reforms through their pressure--in Austria the nine-hour day, in France the eight-hour day. The most important consequence of the Belgian mass strike in 1893 was the conquest of universal, unequal suffrage. Last year's Swedish mass strike, formally concluded with a compromise, actually warded off a general attack by the confederated business world on the Swedish unions. In Austria, demonstration strikes have mightily hastened electoral reform. The mass strikes of the farm workers, with their formal partial ineffectiveness, have greatly strengthened the organization among the farm workers of Italy and Galicia. All mass strikes, whether economic or political, demonstration or fighting strikes, have contained what Comrade Oda Olberg so compellingly described in her report of the Italian railroad workers' strike in the Neue Zeit:

> The achievements of the political mass strike are incalculable: its worth continuously grows with the degree of proletarian class consciousness. A political strike carried out with energy and solidarity is never lost, because it is what it aims at--a developing exercise of the proletariat's power in which the fighters steel their strength and sense of responsibility, and

the ruling classes become conscious of their adversary's might.*

But if until now every mass strike without exception, "West European" as well as Russian, in direct contradiction to Comrade Kautsky's newest schema has brought on neither the total victory nor the destruction of the proletariat, but on the contrary an almost invariable strengthening of the workers' organizations, class consciousness, and self-confidence, then on the other side the question arises: how can that great and "final," that apocalyptic mass strike in which the stoutest oaks crack, the earth bursts asunder and the graves open actually come to pass in Germany, if the mass of the proletariat has not previously been prepared, schooled, and aroused by an entire lengthy period of mass strikes, of economic or political mass struggles?

According to Comrade Kautsky, "the entire proletariat of the Reich" will plunge into this "final" mass strike, and what is more "with its entire strength." But how are the Prusso-German state employees, the railroad workers, postal workers, etc., who today are paralysed in "slavish obedience," the farm workers who have no right to organize and no organization, the broad strata of workers still stuck in enemy organizations, in Christian, Hirsch-Dunckerist,[15] yellow unions--in short, the great mass of the German proletariat whom we have not yet reached with our union organization or Social Democratic agitation--how are they suddenly, with one leap, to be ready for a "final" mass strike "to the death" unless a preceding period of tempestuous mass struggles, demonstration strikes,

* Neue Zeit XXIII, 2, p. 385.

[15] The German Christian (Catholic) and Hirsch-Duncker unions were antisocialist--the latter were also opposed to strikes. In 1907, 14.9 percent of all German union members belonged to these unions; about another 4 percent belonged to various "independent" unions, some of which were openly controlled by the employers. (Tr.)

partial mass strikes, giant economic struggles, etc., loosens them little by little from their paralysis, their slavish obedience, their fragmentation, and incorporates them among the followers of Social Democracy?

Even Comrade Kautsky had to see this. "Naturally," he says, "I do not imagine this one-time event as an isolated act 'shot from a pistol.' I too expect an era of embittered mass struggles and mass actions, but with the mass strike as the final weapon." But what "mass struggles and mass actions" does Comrade Kautsky have in mind which will lead to that "final" mass strike, which do not themselves consist of the mass strike? Could it be street demonstrations? But one cannot simply hold street demonstrations for decades on end. And Comrade Kautsky certainly rules out general, impressive demonstration strikes for Germany: indeed, it is "entirely unthinkable that in a demonstration strike against the government here, commuter railways, streetcars, and gas works come to a standstill." Likewise, economic mass strikes could not accomplish that preparation for the political mass strike: according to Comrade Kautsky they are to be kept at a strict distance from the political mass strike, to him they are not at all beneficial but even--almost harmful. Of what, finally, shall those "embittered" mass struggles and mass actions of the preparatory era consist? Perhaps of "embittered" Reichstag elections, or meetings with protest resolutions? But those enormous strata of the unorganized or oppositionally organized proletariat, upon whom the "final" mass strike depends, unfortunately stay away from our meetings. And so it is utterly impossible to conceive how we will actually win, arouse, and school the "entire proletariat of the Reich" for the final struggle "to the death."

Whether Comrade Kautsky wishes it or not, his final mass strike, just in ruling out a period of the mass strike's economic and political character, comes at us simply shot from a pistol.

the ruling classes become conscious of their adversary's might.*

But if until now every mass strike without exception, "West European" as well as Russian, in direct contradiction to Comrade Kautsky's newest schema has brought on neither the total victory nor the destruction of the proletariat, but on the contrary an almost invariable strengthening of the workers' organizations, class consciousness, and self-confidence, then on the other side the question arises: how can that great and "final," that apocalyptic mass strike in which the stoutest oaks crack, the earth bursts asunder and the graves open actually come to pass in Germany, if the mass of the proletariat has not previously been prepared, schooled, and aroused by an entire lengthy period of mass strikes, of economic or political mass struggles?

According to Comrade Kautsky, "the entire proletariat of the Reich" will plunge into this "final" mass strike, and what is more "with its entire strength." But how are the Prusso-German state employees, the railroad workers, postal workers, etc., who today are paralysed in "slavish obedience," the farm workers who have no right to organize and no organization, the broad strata of workers still stuck in enemy organizations, in Christian, Hirsch-Dunckerist,[15] yellow unions--in short, the great mass of the German proletariat whom we have not yet reached with our union organization or Social Democratic agitation--how are they suddenly, with one leap, to be ready for a "final" mass strike "to the death" unless a preceding period of tempestuous mass struggles, demonstration strikes,

* Neue Zeit XXIII, 2, p. 385.

[15] The German Christian (Catholic) and Hirsch-Duncker unions were antisocialist--the latter were also opposed to strikes. In 1907, 14.9 percent of all German union members belonged to these unions; about another 4 percent belonged to various "independent" unions, some of which were openly controlled by the employers. (Tr.)

partial mass strikes, giant economic struggles, etc., loosens them little by little from their paralysis, their slavish obedience, their fragmentation, and incorporates them among the followers of Social Democracy?

Even Comrade Kautsky had to see this. "Naturally," he says, "I do not imagine this one-time event as an isolated act 'shot from a pistol.' I too expect an era of embittered mass struggles and mass actions, but with the mass strike as the final weapon." But what "mass struggles and mass actions" does Comrade Kautsky have in mind which will lead to that "final" mass strike, which do not themselves consist of the mass strike? Could it be street demonstrations? But one cannot simply hold street demonstrations for decades on end. And Comrade Kautsky certainly rules out general, impressive demonstration strikes for Germany: indeed, it is "entirely unthinkable that in a demonstration strike against the government here, commuter railways, streetcars, and gas works come to a standstill." Likewise, economic mass strikes could not accomplish that preparation for the political mass strike: according to Comrade Kautsky they are to be kept at a strict distance from the political mass strike, to him they are not at all beneficial but even--almost harmful. Of what, finally, shall those "embittered" mass struggles and mass actions of the preparatory era consist? Perhaps of "embittered" Reichstag elections, or meetings with protest resolutions? But those enormous strata of the unorganized or oppositionally organized proletariat, upon whom the "final" mass strike depends, unfortunately stay away from our meetings. And so it is utterly impossible to conceive how we will actually win, arouse, and school the "entire proletariat of the Reich" for the final struggle "to the death."

Whether Comrade Kautsky wishes it or not, his final mass strike, just in ruling out a period of the mass strike's economic and political character, comes at us simply shot from a pistol.

But finally, one must ask: what kind of a "final" mass strike is this, that comes only once and in which the entire proletariat of the Reich will grapple to the death? Should we understand by this a periodic "final" mass strike which in every great political campaign--for example, for Prussian voting rights, to prevent the outbreak of war, etc.--will finally give the decision? But one cannot periodically struggle "to the death" again and again. Painted thus, a mass strike in which the "entire proletariat" grapples "with its entire strength" "to the death" can only be the struggle for total political power in the state: obviously the "final" struggle "to the death" can only be that in which the proletariat wrestles for its dictatorship and to finish off the bourgeois class-state. In this way, the political mass strike for Germany withdraws farther and farther. First, through the "strategy of attrition" it was expected the year after the Reichstag elections: now it vanishes from sight as the "final," the solitary mass strike and teases us, from beyond the blue horizon, with--the social revolution.

Let us now recall the stipulations which Comrade Kautsky, in his first article "What Now?" attaches to accomplishment of the political mass strike--strictest secrecy of preparations, decision-making by the supreme "war council" of the party, the greatest possible surprise of the enemy--and we unexpectedly receive a mental image which bears a strong resemblance to the "final Great Day" of the general strike after the anarchist formula. The idea of the mass strike is transformed from a historical process of the modern proletarian class struggles in their decades-long period of conclusion, into a free-for-all in which the "entire proletariat of the Reich," with one jolt, suddenly brings down the bourgeois social order.

But what did Comrade Kautsky write in 1907 in his Social Revolution, 2nd edition, p. 54?

That is nonsensical. A general strike in which all workers in a country cease their labors at a given signal presupposes a unaminity and organization of the workers which can hardly be reached in the present society--and if it were reached, would be so irresistible as to dispense with the general strike. But such a strike, with one jolt, would suddenly render not merely the existing society, but every existence impossible--that of the proletarians even sooner than that of the capitalists. It would thus infallibly break at the very moment it began to unfold its revolutionary effect.

As a means of political struggle, the strike could hardly (certainly not in the foreseeable future) assume the form of a strike by all workers in a country. . We face a period when the isolated, non-political strike will be as hopeless against the superior strength of the cartels as the isolated parliamentary action of the workers' parties is against the force of the capitalist-controlled state power. It will become ever more urgent for each to supplement the other and draw new strength from their joint action.

Like the use of every new weapon, that of the political strike must first be learned.

And so the more Comrade Kautsky turned to broad theoretical generalizations to justify his position in the Prussian voting rights struggle, the more he lost sight of the general perspective of the development of the class struggle in Western Europe and in Germany--which in previous years he never tired of pointing out. Indeed, he himself had an uncomfortable sense of his present viewpoint's incongruence with his earlier one, and was therefore good enough to completely reproduce his 1904 article series

"Revolutionaries Everywhere" in the final, third part of his reply to me. The crass contradiction is not thereby done away with: it has only resulted in the chaotic, flickering character of that article's last part, which so remarkably lessens one's pleasure in reading it.

But not that article series alone is in shrill dissonance with what Comrade Kautsky now advances. In his Social Revolution, we read that we will enter a whole lengthy period of revolutionary struggles in which the political mass strike will "surely play a great role" (p. 54). The entire pamphlet The Road to Power is devoted to the depiction of the same perspective. Yes, here we have already entered into the revolutionary period. Here Comrade Kautsky reviews the "political testament" of Friedrich Engels and declares the time of the "strategy of attrition," which consists of legal exploitation of the given state groundwork, to be already past:

> At the beginning of the '90s, I acknowledged that a peaceful development of proletarian organizations and the proletarian class struggle on the given state groundwork would bring the proletariat farthest forward in the situation of that time. And so you cannot reproach me with a craving for the intoxication of rrrevolution and rrradicalism when my observation of the present situation leads me to the view that conditions have fundamentally changed since the beginning of the '90s, that we have every reason to assume we have entered into a period of struggles for the state institutions and state power: struggles which under manifold changes of fortune could be drawn out for decades, whose forms and duration are unforeseeable at present, but which will most probably bring about a considerable increase in the proletariat's power in the foreseeable

future, if not indeed its total power in Western Europe.

And farther on:

> But in this universal instability, the immediate tasks of the proletariat are clearly given. We have already developed them. There will be no further progress without altering the state groundwork on which we wage the struggle. To most energetically strive for democracy in the Reich, but also in the individual states--specifically in Prussia and Saxony--that is its first task in Germany; its first international task is the struggle against geopolitics and militarism.
>
> As clearly visible as these problems are the means at our command for their solution. To those previously employed is now added the mass strike, which we had already theoretically accepted at the beginning of the '90s, and whose applicability under favorable circumstances has since then been repeatedly demonstrated.*

In his Social Revolution, in The Road to Power, in the Neue Zeit Comrade Kautsky preached the "political strike" to the German unions as the "new tactic" which would be compelled more and more as the cartels condemned the pure union strike to more and more ineffectiveness. Indeed it was this concept which led him, in bygone years, to an embittered feud with the Correspondence Bulletin of the General Commission of Unions.

Now Comrade Kautsky would strictly sever economic strikes from political action. Now he declares that all strikes in Western Europe must unconditionally achieve "definite successes" or they have "failed their purpose"; and as the means of

* The Road to Power, pp. 53, 101. My emphasis.

"organizing the proletariat, heightening its insight and sense of strength, and increasing the masses' confidence in their organizations," he counts only "successfully fought campaigns for higher wages." After all, we need nothing so urgently now as "visible successes" to impress the masses. "But there are few successes which so visibly document our mounting strength to the masses as electoral victories, as the conquest of new mandates." Thus, Reichstag elections and mandates--that is Moses and the prophets!

Now we hear that the German worker is only ready for "safe" demonstrations, that "a mere demonstration strike is not even the most impressive" form of political protest, that "a victorious Reichstag election makes a far greater impact"! And finally "a real mass demonstration" worth anything at all, "which is not required for immediate defense, but which simply protests an injustice already existing for over half a century": such a demonstration strike "without a powerful motive" would hardly be possible in Germany. Comrade Kautsky has simply not noticed that with his argumentation he has, in passing, leaked out the finest theoretical ground for--the abolition of May Day.

Comrade Kautsky quite rightly reminds us that "even before the Russian Revolution" he gave an exact description of the working of a political mass strike in his article "Revolutionaries Everywhere." But it seems to me that what matters is not merely to sketch revolutionary struggles and their external course in theoretical abstraction--that is, in Never-Never Land--and to project their general schema: it is equally a matter of giving, at the same time, those slogans in practice which will release the maximum of the proletariat's revolutionary energy and drive the situation forward the farthest and fastest.

Granted, in his numerous articles and his pamphlets Comrade Kautsky has given us, with

compelling clarity, a picture of the revolutionary struggles of the future. For example, in his 1904 description of the mass strike he already showed how "every mansion, every granary, every factory, every telegraph office, every stretch of railroad is militarily guarded"; how the soldiers are loosed upon the masses everywhere, and how in spite of this it never comes to a battle "for wherever they come the masses scatter, to reassemble wherever the soldiers have not yet arrived or have just left"; how first "gas and electric works shut down, streetcars stop running, finally even the mails and railroads are seized by the strike fever; first the state workers strike, then the junior civil servants as well"--in short, all is here with a three-dimensionality, life, and realism that are all the more remarkable, in that he deals with events coming at us out of the blue sky. But when from these aetherial heights, where theory calmly circles like an eagle, the question first plunged to the flat land of the Prussian voting rights campaign, then suddenly the brainless and planless Prussian government was transfigured into a rocher de bronze [rock of bronze--Tr.]; the German conditions depicted in The Road to Power as ready for social revolution (Hurrah! March on! March on!) turned into a frozen land where "it is absolutely unthinkable" that workers in state workshops and civil servants, be they junior or senior, take part in a demonstration; and the "revolutionary era which is arising" transformed itself into an industrious preparation for Reichstag elections, for "there are few successes which so visibly document our strength to the masses" as--Reichstag mandates.

Heaven-storming theory--and "attrition" in practice; most revolutionary perspectives in the clouds--and Reichstag mandates as sole perspective in reality. Comrade Kautsky declared his campaign against me with the urgent necessity of rescuing the idea of the mass strike from compromise. I fear it would have been better for the idea of the mass strike as well as Comrade Kautsky, if this rescue had been forborne.

VI

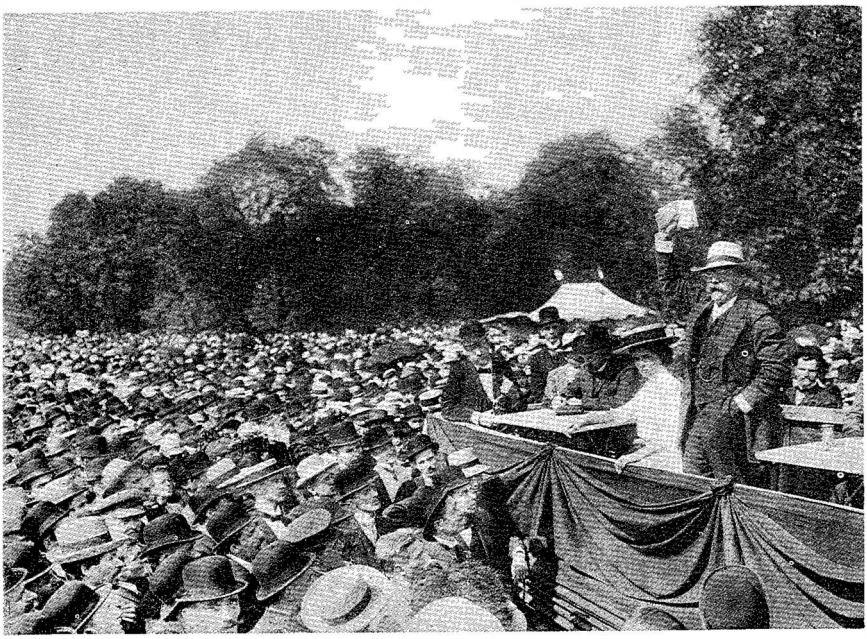
Let us return to Prussia.

At the beginning of March, in view of the voting rights campaign which had begun and the mounting demonstration movement, I declared that if the party wished to lead the movement farther forward it must make the slogan of the mass strike the order of the day, and that a demonstration mass strike would be the first step toward this in the present situation. I considered that the party faced a dilemma: it would either raise the voting rights movement to sharper forms or, as in 1908, the movement would go back to sleep after a short time. Indeed, this was what summoned Comrade Kautsky to the field of battle against me.

And what do we see? Comrade Kautsky points out that, me to the contrary, we have certainly not experienced a hint of a mass strike; he triumphs that the situation has struck my initiative "dead as a doornail." Now it seems that in his polemic zeal, Comrade Kautsky has completely overlooked something else that has unfortunately been struck "dead as a doornail": namely the demonstrations, and with them the voting rights movement itself.

Comrade Kautsky argues against me that an intensification of the demonstrations is entirely unnecessary, that the party faces no dilemma, that the main thing is "to bring about the wider employment of street demonstrations--not to slacken in this, but on the contrary to make them ever mightier."* Well, since April the street demonstrations have totally ceased. And not, indeed,

* "What Now?" Neue Zeit, 15 April 1910, p. 71.



Berlin SPD voting rights demonstration, 1910.

through some lack of enthusiasm and fighting spirit among the masses: their inner creativity has not gone to sleep. No, the street demonstrations were simply called off by the leading party authorities in the face of the struggles and endeavors of the provinces, as the 1st of May has shown, as the May demonstrations in Breslau and Braunschweig have further shown--deliberately called off. Just as I wrote in my first reply in the Neue Zeit, even at the end of March--without awaiting the further course of events and of the situation--under pressure of the mood of the provinces, they arranged the April 10 demonstration with the feeling: An end to this at last! And an end has been made. No demonstrations, not even meetings take up the voting rights question, the storm-breathing rubric of the voting rights struggle has disappeared from the party press. And this circumstance can serve as surest

symptom that the thing, for the time being, is over and no longer actual: that our leading central organ Vörwarts began to concern itself with tactics in the voting rights struggle. "The popular movement in the grand style" is meanwhile sent back home.

What does Comrade Kautsky say to this? Does he who brought "Jest, Satire, Irony and Deeper Meaning"[16] to bear on me venture the slightest word of reproach to the "higher authorities" who, despite his warning "not to slacken in the street demonstrations," have plainly killed the demonstration movement? On the contrary: here Comrade Kautsky is all admiration, he can find only words of wonder for "the latest demonstration campaign" which "was the model of a successful strategy of attrition." Quite right. This is just how it looks in practice, this "strategy of attrition" which, "worn down" by two bold steps forward, rests on its laurels and lets the crashing overture of the "popular movement in the grand style" run down into the gentle purring of preparations for Reichstag elections.[17]

So the voting rights movement is again brought to a standstill for one, perhaps two years: and what is more, at such a well-chosen moment that we have rendered the government the greatest service anyone could have possibly done it.

[16] Jest, Satire, Irony and Deeper Meaning is the title of a comedy by Christian Dietrich Grabbe.

[17] Luxemburg is alluding to a passage from Section 3 of Marx's The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte. "But the revolutionary threats of the petty bourgeoisie and their democratic representatives are merely attempts to intimidate the opponent. And when they have run themselves up a blind alley, when they have so compromised themselves that they are forced to act out their threats, then this is done in an ambiguous way that shuns nothing more than the means to the end and snatches at pretexts for defeat. The crashing overture which proclaimed the struggle dies down into a gentle purring as soon as the struggle is supposed to begin, the actors cease to take themselves au sérieux, and the performance falls as flat as an air-filled balloon pricked with a pin." (Tr.)

The withdrawal of the suffrage bill by Bethmann-Hollweg was the decisive moment. The government was in a tight corner. The parliamentary patchwork of electoral reform and the parliamentary horse-trading were bankrupt. The enemy was at the end of his rope. If we really were serious about practicing the "voting rights storm," about the slogan "no peace in Prussia," about the great words of the Prussian party convention, then the collapse of the government bill was the given moment to immediately launch a general, grandiose attack out of this fiasco of parliamentary action with the cry "Give us a new bill!", with street demonstrations across the whole country which would then have led to a demonstration mass strike and mightily driven the struggle forward. Comrade Kautsky, who has most graciously proposed to acknowledge such brain storms as "armed" assembly in Treptower Park[18] as the application of my "strategy," has here a clear example of what "my strategy" really calls for. Not childish Don Quixoteries like those Comrade Kautsky demands of me, but political exploitation of the enemy's defeat as the only victory--which, moreover, is not so much the discovery of some "new strategy," but rather the ABC of every revolutionary, yes, of every serious battle tactic.

That was the party's task. And I am not here pronouncing the party's unqualified duty to open a "revolutionary period" every Monday and Thursday. But I feel that <u>if</u> the party begins an action, <u>if</u> it has summoned up the storm and called its men-at-arms the people to the field of battle, if it has

[18] Berlin police chief Traugott von Jagow had banned street demonstrations with his "public notice" of February 13, 1910: "The 'right to the streets' is being proclaimed. The streets are exclusively for the purpose of commerce. Resistance to state authority will result in the use of weapons. I warn the curious." Berlin Social Democracy called a demonstration in Treptower Park on March 6, 1910 for democratic voting rights; as the police were waiting there in force it was redirected to the Berlin zoo, where 150,000 demonstrated for free, equal, and universal suffrage before the police arrived.

spoken of a "popular movement in the grand style" and attack "by all forces"--then it dare not, after two advances, suddenly scratch its head, gape about, and declare: "Never mind . . . we didn't mean it seriously this time . . let's go home." In my opinion such storm-mongering on approval and at word of command is unworthy of the party's greatness and the seriousness of the situation, and inclined to discredit the party in the eyes of the masses. Further, the voting rights and demonstration movement which had begun was an excellent opportunity for arousing and enlightening the indifferent masses, and for winning unsympathetically-minded circles of workers as our regular agitation is not in the least in a position to do. By deliberately stopping the movement short, the party has left this splendid opportunity unexploited after the most beautiful beginning.

But further, and above all, political points of view come into question. It is most shortsighted to mechanically divide the question of Prussian electoral reform from the question of Reichstag voting rights and to declare that our big guns won't go into action over the Prussian voting rights struggle, that we'll save them in case Reichstag voting rights are annulled after the Reichstag elections. Plainly, one must deliberately close one's eyes to the actual interconnections not to see that in the present situation, struggle for Prussian electoral reform is essentially nothing other than struggle for Reichstag voting rights. It is clear that an energetic and victorious campaign for Prussian voting rights is the surest way to parry, in advance, a blow against Reichstag voting rights. The resolute and persistant follow-through of the voting rights struggle would simultaneously have been a defensive action against the reaction's hankering for a coup d'état--an action which would have had all the advantages of an offense over a forced defense.

Now Comrade Kautsky objects--and this is his

last trump--that since the mass strike has not, as we see, broken out, that is the best proof how little it flowed from the situation and how mistaken my standpoint was:

> But the very fact that it is still being debated shows that the situation is still not this ripe. As long as one can still dispute and investigate whether or not the mass strike is opportune, the proletariat as a collective mass is not filled with that mass exasperation and sense of strength which are necessary if the mass strike is to be accomplished. If the necessary mood for it had been present in March, then a dissuasive voice like mine would have been smothered under a protest of raging anger.

Here Comrade Kautsky shows an interesting oscillation between extremes: now the mass strike is a coup carefully hatched in the inner sanctum of the war council, secretly prepared in whispers; now it is "an elemental upheaval whose commencement cannot be brought about at will, which one can await but not arrange." I feel that the task of the Social Democratic Party and its leadership consists in neither the secretive hatching of "great plans" nor the "awaiting" of elemental upheavals. Mass strikes--as I clearly stated in my first article in the Dortmund Arbeiter-Zeitung--cannot be "made" by an order from the "supreme command," they must arise from the masses and their advancing action. But politically, in the sense of an energetic tactic, a powerful offensive, to so lead this action forward that the masses are ever more conscious of their tasks--that the party can do, and that is also its duty. Social Democracy cannot artificially create a revolutionary mass movement; but, circumstances permitting, it can certainly cripple the finest mass action through its wavering, feeble tactics. Proof is furnished by the aborted, or rather, the immediately countermanded voting rights mass strike of

1902 in Belgium.[19] How effectively the party can prevent a mass strike, this "elemental upheaval," by putting on the brakes under certain circumstances, even when the masses are battle-ready to the highest degree--Comrade Kautsky himself has reported this with regard to Austria. "But even though," he tells us,

> Even though conditions in Austria favor a mass strike far more than they do here, and even though the Austrian masses were temporarily aroused to a level from which we in Germany remain far distant, to such an agitation that they could only be held back from launching into a mass strike by the utmost exertion of all forces; and finally, even though repeatedly and in the most positive way "threatened" with the mass strike, the comrades responsible for the tactics of the party have violently put on the brakes and prevented one up till now.*

It is self-explanatory that this obstructive role of the party leadership could appear most actively in Germany, in view of the extraordinarily developed organizational centralism and discipline in our party. As I earlier wrote in my article "What Next?":

> In a party where, as in Germany, the principle of organization and party discipline is so unprecedentedly cherished, and where in consequence the initiative of unorganized popular masses--their spontaneous, so to speak improvised capacity for

[19] On April 14, 1902, a mass strike began in Belgium in which over 300,000 workers took part. It was broken off on April 20 by the General Council of the Belgian Workers' Party, although the demands for changes in suffrage and the related constitutional amendment had been rejected on April 18 by the Belgian chamber.

* Neue Zeit XXIV, 2, p. 856.

action, such a significant, often decisive factor in all previous great political struggles--is nearly ignored, then it is the inescapable duty of the party to demonstrate the worth of this so highly developed organization and discipline even for great actions, and their worth even for other forms of struggle than parliamentary elections.

The past fate of the Prussian voting rights movement almost seems to demonstrate that our organizational apparatus and our party discipline prove themselves better, just now, at braking than at leading great mass actions. When even in advance the street demonstrations are timidly and reluctantly worked out; when every necessary opportunity to raise the demonstrations to a higher power--like March 18, like the 1st of May--is embarrassingly shunned; when our own victories like the conquest of our right to the streets on April 10, as well as the defeats of the enemy like the withdrawal of the government bill are left totally unexploited; when finally the demonstrations are put back on the shelf after all and the masses are sent home; in short, when everything is done to hold back, to cripple the mass action, to deaden the militancy: then obviously that tempestuous movement cannot arise from the masses, which must vent itself in a mass strike.

Naturally the obstructive effect of such leadership is most nearly decisive when the action is still in its initial stages--as is the case with us in Germany, where it is just taking its first steps. If once the revolutionary period is fully unfolded, if the clouds of battle are already rising high, then no brake-pulling by the party leaders will be able to accomplish much, for the masses will simply shove aside their leaders who set themselves against the storm of the movement. Thus could it also happen in Germany, one day. But in the interest of Social Democracy, I find it neither necessary nor

desirable to steer that way. If we in Germany unquestioningly wait with the mass strike until the masses, with "raging anger," storm right over their brake-pulling leaders, this obviously can happen only at the expense of the influence and prestige of Social Democracy. And then it could easily appear that the complicated organizational apparatus and the strict party discipline of which we are justly proud are, unfortunately, only a first-rate makeshift for the parliamentary and union daily routine; and with the given disposition of our leading circles they are a hinderance to the mass action in the grand style, to what is demanded by the coming era of violent struggles.

And in the same connection, another especially weak point in our organizational relations could have a disastrous effect. If the union leaders had publicly come out on their own against the slogan of the mass strike in the latest voting rights campaign, it would only have clarified the situation and sharpened the critique of the masses. But that they didn't have to do this, that instead through the medium of the party and with the aid of the party apparatus they could throw the total authority of Social Democracy into the balance to put the brakes on the mass action--that has brought the voting rights movement to a standstill, and Comrade Kautsky has merely provided the theoretical music.

Yet in spite of all this our cause moves forward. The enemy works for us so unceasingly, it is through no merit of our own that we're in the clover both in and out of season. Yet in the end it is not the task of the class party of the proletariat simply to live on the sins and errors of its enemies despite its own errors, but to accelerate the course of events through its own energy and to release, not the minimum, but the maximum of action and class struggle in that impulse.

And when in the future the mass action again

arises, then the party will face exactly the same problem it did two years ago and last spring. After these two trials, the broad circles of our party comrades must from now on clearly understand that a real mass action in the grand style can only be kindled and at length maintained when treated, not as a dry practice piece played to the time of the party leadership's baton, but as a great class struggle in which all significant economic conflicts must be utilized to the full and all forces which arouse the masses must be guided into the vortex of the movement, and in which one doesn't shun a mounting intensification of the situation and decisive struggles, but goes to meet them with resolute, consistent tactics. Perhaps the present discussion will contribute its part to this.

"In Conclusion." from ATTRITION OR COLLISION

In conclusion, a little historical reminiscence--yet one which is not without agreeable parallels to the present. Comrade Kautsky rejects, for Prussia, the examples of other lands where the mass strike has recently been used. Russia counts for nothing as an example, neither does Belgium or even Austria. For it is "out of the question to appeal to the examples of other lands in the present situation in Prussia."[20] But in search of the fitting model for our tactic, Comrade Kautsky himself goes back to the old Romans and Hannibal. Here he finds an example for the edification of the German proletariat in Fabius the Procrastinator, with his allegedly victorious "strategy of attrition."

To me, going back to the antique Romans seems rather far fetched: but since Comrade Kautsky has already done so, I would like to demonstrate that, here too, the facts are not quite correct. The fable of the necessary and victorious strategy of the Cunctator was destroyed by Mommsen, who proved that from the beginning "the natural and correct employment" of Roman military forces was a resolute attack, and that the Fabian procrastination (which Mommsen calls "methodic do-nothing") was not the expression of some deep strategic plan dictated by the situation, but flowed from the conservative and senile politics of the Senate.

[20] Kautsky, "What Now?" p. 36.

"Quintus Fabius," says Mommsen, "was a man well on in years, of a circumspection and determination which appear to have been nothing less than procrastination and obstinacy; a zealous worshipper of the good old days, the political omnipotence of the Senate, the magistral authority; for the salvation of the state he looked first to sacrifices and prayers, then to methodic military leadership." "A leading statesman in command of the interconnection of events must have come to grief here," he says in another place, "where everywhere either too little or too much had already been done. Now the war began, in which the enemy had been allowed to decide the time and place; and in their well-founded consciousness of military superiority, they were at a loss for a goal and direction for their first operations." An offensive in Spain and Africa was the first commandment of tactics, "but they heeded the command of interest as little as that of honor."

> That through this hesitation the Spanish allies of Rome would be sacrificed for the second time, could have been foreseen as easily as the hesitation itself could have been avoided.
>
> However wise it may have been for the Romans to remain on the defensive and expect their chief success through cutting off the enemy's means of subsistence, yet it was surely a strange system of defense and of "starving them out" when the enemy--under the eyes of a numerically equal Roman army--was allowed, with Central Asian indifference, to lay the land waste unhindered and in great measure to adequately provision himself for winter through systematic foraging.
>
> Finally, it could not be said that the Roman army forced this conduct of the war

upon its general. To be sure, it was composed in part of militia recently called-up: but its core was the veteran legions from Arminium. Far from being demoralized by the recent defeats, they were embittered over the dishonorable task alloted them by their general, "Hannibal's lackey," and clamorously demanded to be led against the enemy. There were violent demonstrations in the popular assemblies against the obstinate old man.

In this vein, Mommsen goes a good deal further. "Rome was not saved by the 'Procrastinator,'" says Mommsen, "but by the firm union of the federation--and equally, perhaps, by the national hatred with which the occidental welcomed Phoenician Man." This was so notorious that finally even "the majority of the Senate, despite the quasi-legitimization which recent events had given the procrastinating system of Fabius, resolved to dismiss the military leadership which was slowly but surely leading the state to ruin."*

This is what it looks like, Fabius Cunctator's victorious "strategy of attrition." It is, in fact, a legend preached at high school students in our schools to drill them in conservative spirits, and to warn them against "rashness" and "revolutionizers"--to drum into them, as the spirit of world history, the motto to which the Home Guard marches: "Forward, ever slowly." That this legend should be served up to the revolutionary proletariat today, in this situation--that is one of the unforeseen decrees of fate.

Be that as it may, it seems to me that an element in our ruling Senate of the party and the unions is adequately depicted here: that element of the noble Quintus Fabius, who looked first to sacrifices and prayers, and then to methodic military

* Theodor Mommsen's Roman History, 3rd ed., 1856, vol. 1, pp. 551-577.

leadership for the salvation of the state. From lack of procrastination, from youthful exuberance and rashness in our party leadership, we have not to my knowledge suffered greatly. As Comrade Adler said at the German-Austrian party convention in Granz:

> A touch of the whip always does good; and I confess that at a party convention, exclamations lamenting that nothing is being done please me far more than those advising discretion and prudence. We take good care of you indeed, prudence--better, perhaps, than we should. We don't need you for brakes!

So, more or less, I think it is with us. That Comrade Kautsky lent his pen and his historical knowledge to advocating the Cunctator strategy was a waste, to say the least. For brakes, Comrade Kautsky, we don't need you.

SPECIAL OFFER TO READERS OF THIS PAMPHLET

Three Draft Chapters from the work-in-progress by Raya Dunayevskaya on Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution

- "Before and After the 1905 Revolution: Two Turning Points in Rosa Luxemburg's Life--1898-99, and 1905-07"
- "The Break With Kautsky, 1910-11: From Mass Strike Theory to Crisis over Morocco--and Hushed-Up 'Woman Question'"
- "Relationship of Philosophy and Revolution to Women's Liberation: Marx's and Engels' Studies Contrasted"

Available for 75¢ each, or all three for $1.50 (plus 28¢ postage) from:

News & Letters
2832 E. Grand Blvd.
Detroit, MI 48211

Get acquainted with Marxist-Humanism . .
Publications of News & Letters Committees

☐—**Marx's Capital and Today's Global Crisis**
By Raya Dunayevskaya ---------------------------- $2 per copy

☐—**Frantz Fanon, Soweto and American Black Thought**
By Lou Turner and John Alan ---------------------- $1 per copy

☐—**American Civilization on Trial, Black Masses as Vanguard**
Includes "Black Caucuses in the Unions,"
by Charles Denby ---------------------------- 75¢ per copy

☐—**Working Women for Freedom**
By Angela Terrano, Marie Dignan and Mary Holmes ---- $1 per copy

☐—**Sexism, Politics & Revolution in Mao's China**
By Raya Dunayevskaya ---------------------------- 50¢ per copy

☐—**Dialectics of Liberation**
Summaries of Hegel's works and Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks
By Raya Dunayevskaya ---------------------------- $1 per copy

☐—**The First General Strike in The U.S.**
By Terry Moon and Ron Brokmeyer ------------------ $1 per copy

☐—**La Lucha Latina Para la Libertad y la Filosofia Marxista-Humanista de Liberacion** -------- $1 per copy

☐—**Mao's China and the 'Proletarian Cultural Revolution'**
By Raya Dunayevskaya ---------------------------- 25¢ per copy

☐—**The Political-Philosophic Letters of Raya Dunayevskaya**
11 Marxist-Humanist analyses of world events ---------- $2 per copy

☐—**New Essays**
By Raya Dunayevskaya ---------------------------- $2 per copy

☐—**News & Letters—**
Unique combination of worker and intellectual,
published 10 times a year -------------------- $1 per subscription

ALSO AVAILABLE FROM NEWS & LETTERS:

☐—**Marxism and Freedom**
Includes preface by Herbert Marcuse ---------------- $6 per copy
(available in Italian, French, Spanish)

☐—**Philosophy and Revolution:**
From Hegel to Sartre and from Marx to Mao -------- $8.95 per copy
(Available in Italian and Spanish)—$5 (hardcover)

☐—**Indignant Heart: A Black Worker's Journal**
By Charles Denby ---------------------------- $4.80 per copy

• •

MAIL ORDERS TO:

News & Letters, 2832 E. Grand Blvd.
Det., Mich. 48211

Enclosed please find $ for the literature checked

Please add 50c to each order for postage and handling.

Name --

Address --

City -------------------------- State ------------ Zip ------------

Who We Are and What We Stand For

News and Letters Committees, an organization of Marxist-Humanists, stand for the abolition of capitalism whether in its private property form as in the U.S., or its state property form as in Russia or China. **News & Letters** was created so that the voices of revolt from below could be heard not separated from the articulation of a philosophy of liberation. A Black production worker, Charles Denby, author of **Indignant Heart: A Black Worker's Journal,** is the editor of the paper. Raya Dunayevskaya, National Chairwoman of the Committees, is the author of **Marxism and Freedom** and **Philosophy and Revolution,** which spell out the philosophic ground of Marx's Humanism internationally as **American Civilization on Trial** concretizes it on the American scene and shows the two-way road between the U.S. and Africa.

News & Letters was founded in 1955, the year of the Detroit wildcats against Automation and the Montgomery Bus Boycott against segregation — activities which signalled a new movement from practice which was itself a form of theory. Vol. 1, No. 1, came off the press on the second anniversary of the June 17, 1953 East German revolt against Russian state-capitalism masquerading as Communism, in order to express our solidarity with freedom fighters abroad as well as at home. Because 1953 was also the year when we worked out the revolutionary dialectics of Marxism in its original form of "a new Humanism," as well as individuality "purified of all that interferes with its universalism, i.e., with freedom itself," we organized ourselves in Committees rather than any elitist party "to lead."

In opposing the capitalistic, racist, sexist, exploitative society, we participate in all class and freedom struggles, nationally and internationally. As our Constitution states: "It is our aim ... to promote the firmest unity among workers, Blacks and other minorities, women, youth and those intellectuals who have broken with the ruling bureaucracy of both capital and labor." We do not separate the mass activities from the activity of thinking. Anyone who is a participant in these freedom struggles for totally new relations and a fundamentally new way of life, and who believes in these principles, is invited to join us. Send for a copy of the Constitution of News and Letters Committees.

763