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ARTICLE



Marxist Political Theory, Diversity of Tactics, and the Doctrine of the Long Civil War

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ABSTRACT

In *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), Marx and Engels “openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions.” However, by 1872, Marx suggested that in some countries it was possible for workers to “achieve their aims by peaceful means.” Since that time, Marxist political theorists have debated whether a transition to socialism can be achieved by parliamentary means alone or whether the transition to socialism requires the use of illegal or even violent tactics. This paper argues that with the resurgence of a socialist movement in the US, the question of tactics is once again an open debate. For this reason, it is useful to revisit the tactical debates of the Second International, because they are directly relevant to contemporary discussions of socialist strategy and tactics in the US, where tactical positions already run the gamut from parliamentarism to armed self-defense.

A capitalist democracy will not allow its electorate to stumble into Socialism by the accident of a verdict at the polls.

– Harold Laski, *Democracy in Crisis* (1935)

In *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), Karl Marx and Frederick Engels argue that “the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy.”¹ This principle was embraced by every important Marxist political theorist of the 20th century. Eduard Bernstein, the originator of evolutionary socialism, argues that “democracy is a condition of socialism.”² Karl Kautsky, the most authoritative proponent of Orthodox Marxism after the death of Marx and Engels concurs that “Socialism without democracy is unthinkable.”³ Similarly, Rosa Luxemburg, a founder of the German Communist Party declared that “without general elections, without unrestricted

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¹Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party [1848],” *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 6 (Marx and Engels 1845–1848) (London, UK: Lawrence & Wishart, 1976), p. 504. See, August H. Nimtz, Jr., *Marx and Engels: Their Contribution to the Democratic Breakthrough* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000).

²Eduard Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1961 [1899]), p. 166. See, Manfred B. Steger, *The Quest for Evolutionary Socialism: Eduard Bernstein and Social Democracy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

³See, Jukka Gronow, *On the Formation of Marxism: Karl Kautsky’s Theory of Capitalism, the Marxism of the Second International, and Karl Marx’s Critique of Political Economy* (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2016).

freedom of the press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinion, life dies out in every public institution."⁴ Even Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, a key leader of the Russian Revolution of 1917 endorsed a tactical resolution adopted by the 3rd Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party, which proclaimed that "the direct interests of the proletariat and the interests of its struggle for the final aims of socialism require the fullest possible measure of political liberty and, consequently, the replacement of the autocratic form of government by a democratic republic."⁵ It is no stretch to argue that there is near universal consensus within the tradition of Marxist political theory that liberal (bourgeois) democracy is a prerequisite or condition of socialism.

However, according to Marx and Engels, the second phase of a working class revolution is to use the power and rights obtained in the struggle for democracy to effect a transition to socialism. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels anticipate a violent and apocalyptic upheaval by the working class and "they openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions."⁶ However, by 1872, Marx acknowledged "that the institutions, customs, and traditions in different countries must be taken into account" and he suggested that in countries like the United States (US), England, and Holland it was possible that workers "may achieve their aims by peaceful means."⁷ Thus, since the death of Marx and Engels, Marxist political theorists have debated the question of whether a transition to socialism can be achieved by purely legal and parliamentary means or whether the transition to socialism requires the use of illegal or even violent tactics. The crux of this question is whether it is possible to enact a peaceful and lawful transition to socialism once liberal democracy is achieved or whether liberal democracy itself confines political action within the structural limits of capitalist society and, thereby, thwarts the final objective of the socialist movement.⁸

This question has repeatedly splintered the Marxist left into social democratic, democratic socialist, revolutionary communist, and anarcho-sindicalist factions,⁹ but in this paper I argue that Marx and Engels were themselves proponents of a diversity of tactics.¹⁰ The diversity of tactics position acknowledges that militant social movements will at least occasionally adopt tactics outside the limits of legality and nonviolence.¹¹ While proponents of this tactical

⁴Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1961 [1918]), p. 71. See, Eric D. Weitz, "Rosa Luxemburg Belongs to Us! German Communism and the Luxemburg Legacy," *Central European History* 27:1 (1994), pp. 27–64 for a critical analysis of Luxemburg's theory of democracy.

⁵Vladimir I. Lenin, "Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution [June-July 1905]," *Collected Works*, Volume 9 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1962), p. 23. See, also, August H. Nimtz, *Lenin's Electoral Strategy from 1907 to the October Revolution of 1917: The Ballot, the Streets – or Both* (New York, US: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).

⁶Marx and Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," p. 519.

⁷Karl Marx, "On the Hague Congress [A Correspondent's Report on a Speech Made at a Meeting in Amsterdam on September 8]," *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 23 (Marx and Engels 1871–1874) (London, UK: Lawrence & Wishart, 1988), p. 254. What is generally omitted from this passage is that Marx continues: "That being true we must also admit that in most countries on the Continent, it is force that must be the lever of our revolutions; it is force which will have to be resorted to for a time in order to establish the rule of the workers."

⁸Tom Bottomore, ed., *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 514 concurs that "the question of whether extensive violence would have to be used to effect a socialist transformation is a perennial one ... and has long been one of the principle issues dividing that tradition."

⁹Clyde W. Barrow, "Legal and Illegal Tactics in Marxist Political Theory," in Paul O'Connell and Umüt Ozsu (eds), *Elgar Handbook on Law and Marxism* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc, 2020).

¹⁰See, <https://diversityoftactics.org/> for an introduction to the concept of diversity of tactics. See, also, Peter Gelderloos, *How Nonviolence Protects the State* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007); Peter Gelderloos, *The Failure of Nonviolence: From the Arab Spring to Occupy* (Seattle, WA: Left Bank Books, 2013).

¹¹Ozawa Bineshi, "People's Movement vs 'Some Peoples' Movement? Tactical Diversity in Successful Social Movements," *Vancouver Media Co-Op* (January 14, 2013), available online at <http://vancouver.mediacoop.ca/blog/bineshii/15604>.

position usually do not advocate a complete militarization of the left, they may at the same time embrace some type of armed resistance as a necessary form of self-defense, while simultaneously adopting a wide spectrum of tactics beyond parliamentarism, but short of armed insurrection depending on the forms and level of repression adopted by the ruling class and its state.

From this perspective, the splintering of Marxist political theory into parliamentary socialism and revolutionary communism on the basis of tactical questions is actually at odds with the fact that Marx and Engels combined both legal and illegal work, as well as parliamentary and insurrectionary work, in their own political activities and never saw the two types of tactics as mutually exclusive choices. While diversity of tactics is generally considered a recent concept that traces its origins to the 1960s, primarily in the works of Malcolm X and Howard Zinn,¹² I argue that diversity of tactics was actually first articulated in 1850 by Marx and Engels under the rubric of a “revolution in permanence.”¹³

This tactical orientation directly influenced Karl Kautsky and Rosa Luxemburg during the Second International debates about tactics and I suggest that Georges Sorel also contributed to the discussion with his *Reflections on Violence* (1906). All of these theorists were engaged in a polemic against Eduard Bernstein and the theory of parliamentary socialism, particularly the idea that one could effect a peaceful and lawful transition to socialism by parliamentary means alone. Insofar as the question of socialism is again on the US political agenda, I suggest that the question of tactics is also a contemporary debate and it is therefore time to revisit the debates of the Second International, not out of some antiquarian curiosity, but because they are directly relevant to contemporary discussions of socialist strategy and tactics in the US, where the discussion already runs the gamut from electoral activity to armed self-defense. In fact, many if not most of the new left-wing organizations in the US seem to be coalescing around the concept of a multi-tendency movement that is tolerant of a diversity of tactics. In contrast to the tactical disputes that splintered the socialist left in the previous century, a diversity of tactics, including the necessity of a militant radical flank was exactly the course of action outlined by Marx and Engels in 1850 (and afterward) as the strategy of a “revolution in permanence” that was later recast by Kautsky as the doctrine of a long civil war.

Socialism and Tactics in the United States Today

The Great Recession (2008–2010), the global financial crisis, and the 2016 US Presidential and Congressional elections have put the question of socialism back on the American

¹²Contemporary social movement activists often identify the first statement of diversity of tactics with Malcolm X's 1964 speech on “The Black Revolution,” where he called for solidarity between organizations practicing armed resistance against racism and organizations committed to nonviolent action (for example, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee). Malcolm X argued that: “Our people have made the mistake of confusing the methods with the objectives. As long as we agree on objectives, we should never fall out with each other just because we believe in different methods or tactics or strategy to reach a common goal,” see, George Breitman (ed.), *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1965), pp. 46–49. In the same year, Howard Zinn, who was a member of SNCC's Board of Advisers, echoed Malcolm's view in his influential essay on “The Limits of Nonviolence,” *Freedomways* (Winter 1964), available online at: https://www.crmvet.org/info/nv_zinn.htm. Howard Zinn, *Disobedience and Democracy: Nine Fallacies on Law and Order* (New York, NY: Random House, 1968) is perhaps the first effort to formalize the concept of diversity of tactics, and to rebut the arguments of legalists, parliamentarists, and proponents of nonviolent direct action.

¹³Daniel Gaido, “The American Worker” and the Theory of Permanent Revolution: Karl Kautsky on Werner Sombart's *Why is There No Socialism in the United States?* *Historical Materialism* 11:4 (2000), pp. 79–123. For the most extensive analysis and exploration of this concept, see, Richard B. Day and Daniel Gaido, eds, *Witness to Permanent Revolution: The Documentary Record* (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2009).

political agenda in a way not seen since the first two decades of the 20th century.¹⁴ In a May 2016 Gallup Poll, it was reported that 35% of Americans had a positive view of socialism compared to 60% who had a positive view of capitalism, but among Democrats 58% had a positive view of socialism compared to 56% with a positive view capitalism. The strongest overall support for socialism was among persons 18–29 years of age (55%), who had grown to maturity or entered the labor force in the aftermath of the Great Recession.¹⁵ A little more than two years later (August 2018), the same Gallup Poll headlined that “Democrats More Positive About Socialism Than Capitalism” with 57% still expressing a positive view of socialism, while those with a favorable view of capitalism had fallen to 47% (a drop of 9 percentage points in two years).¹⁶

Furthermore, if references to Socialism and Karl Marx in the *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) are taken as an indicator of elite opinion then the resurgence of socialism in America has definitely captured the attention of the US capitalist class and they are worried about it. One recent reviewer for the WSJ lamented that because of the 2008 financial crisis: “Karl Marx is enjoying a moment.”¹⁷ While many of the references to socialism in the WSJ have been blithely dismissive, another recent opinion piece warns readers: “Socialism? Yes, Be Afraid.”¹⁸

In fact, in the 32 months since January 1, 2016 when the last US Presidential election was gaining momentum, the word “socialism” has appeared in 400 reports, editorials, reviews, and letters published by the *Wall Street Journal*, while the name “Karl Marx” has appeared in 72 items during this same time (see Figure 1). In the previous comparable 32 months, the word “socialism” appeared in 144 reports, editorials, reviews, and letters published by the *Wall Street Journal*, while the name “Karl Marx” appeared in 25 such items. Notably none of the mentions of socialism and Karl Marx during this period appear until January 2008, when it became clear that the United States had entered a *Great Recession* and that the global capitalist financial system was in full meltdown. Thus, while it was the US Presidential election that seems to have generated a dramatic surge in mentions of socialism and Karl Marx, it is the Great Recession and the global financial crisis that stimulated their appearance in the first place as there were no mentions of either term in the comparable 32 month period before the Great Recession (see Figure 1).

Against this backdrop, US Senator Bernie Sanders (D-Vermont) became the first self-avowed socialist to run for US President since Norman Thomas ran as the last member of Eugene Debs’ former Socialist Party of America.¹⁹ The Sanders campaign stimulated grassroots enthusiasm for socialism, which resulted in a membership surge for the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) – the direct descendant of Debs’ Socialist Party. DSA membership rose from 6,216 in 2015 to 50,000 in 2018, while the number of local DSA chapters increased from 40 to 181 during the same time.²⁰ In the 2017 election,

¹⁴Greg Albo, Sam Gindin, and Leo Panitch, *In and Out of Crisis: The Global Financial Meltdown and Left Alternatives* (Oakland, CA: Specter PM Press, 2010).

¹⁵Frank Newport, “Americans’ View of Socialism, Capitalism Are Little Changed,” Gallup (May 6, 2016), available online at: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/191354/americans-views-socialism-capitalism-little-changed.aspx>.

¹⁶Frank Newport, “Democrats More Positive About Socialism Than Capitalism,” Gallup (August 13, 2018), available online at: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/240725/democrats-positive-socialism-capitalism.aspx>.

¹⁷Andrew Stuttaford, “Better Dead than Read,” *Wall Street Journal* 7 (July 2018), p. C12.

¹⁸Daniel Henninger, “Socialism? Yes, Be Afraid,” *Wall Street Journal* 14 (March 2019), p. A17.

¹⁹Norman Thomas ran for US President six times consecutively as the nominee of the Socialist Party of America (1928–1948).

²⁰See, https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/dsausa/pages/1848/attachments/original/1459724900/43_3_winter_2015.pdf?1459724900, p. 10 and <https://democraticleft.dsausa.org/files/sites/6/2018/12/DL-Winter-2018.pdf>, p. 7.

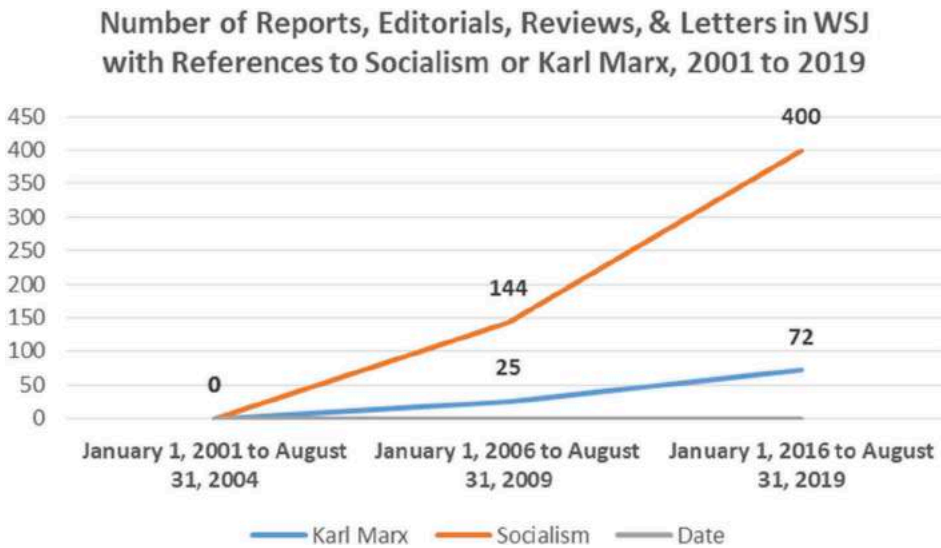


Figure 1. Number of Reports, Editorials, Reviews, & Letters in WSJ with References to Socialism or Karl Marx, 2001 to 2019.

Source: Data compiled from ProQuest.

15 members of the DSA were elected to office in 13 states with the most notable being Lee J. Carter, who was elected to the Virginia House of Delegates, and brought the total number of DSA members holding elected office to thirty-five nationwide. In November of 2018, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-New York) and Rashida Tlaib (D-Michigan) subsequently became the first socialists elected to the US Congress since Victor Berger (1923–1929) was last elected from Milwaukee.²¹

The DSA declares that its “members use a variety of tactics from legislative action to direct action, to fight for reforms that empower working people.”²² Its online history states that DSA is “an ecumenical, multi-tendency socialist organization,” which welcomes all socialists “regardless of your position (or lack thereof) on some arcane split in socialist history, or even whether you believe in the possibility of independent electoral work inside or outside the Democratic Party ballot line.”²³ While DSA is intensely focused on electoral activity, its members also engage in a wide range of non-electoral direct actions, including tail light replacement events, shutting down the Portland ICE facility,²⁴ and supporting Antifa groups to challenge alt-right, fascist, and neo-Nazi organizations in cities across the United States. Its members often support other nonaffiliated movements

²¹Victor Berger was a prominent member of the “right-wing” of the American Socialist Party, who was first elected to the US Congress in 1919. However, he was expelled from his seat by Congress after being convicted of violating the Espionage Act for his opposition to World War I. His conviction was overturned by the US Supreme Court in 1921. See, Sally M. Miller, *Victor Berger and the Promise of Constructive Socialism, 1910–1920* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973).

²²DSA, “Who We Are & What We Do,” available online at: <https://www.dsausa.org>.

²³Joseph M. Schwartz, “A History of Democratic Socialists of America, 1971–2017,” available online at: <https://www.dsausa.org/about-us/history>.

²⁴Cleve R. Wootson, Jr., “A Protest Movement Shut Down an ICE Facility in Portland – And is Spreading to Other Cities,” *The Washington Post* (June 25, 2018), available online at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2018/06/25/a-protest-movement-shut-down-an-ice-facility-in-portland-and-is-spreading-to-other-cities/>.

on behalf of women's rights, immigrant rights, minority civil rights, and environmental justice.

Notably, however, there has simultaneously been a proliferation of other left-wing organizations committed to various forms of socialism and communism, anarcho-syndicalism, anti-capitalism, anti-racism, and anti-fascism. For example, the Working Families Party (WFP) was founded in 1998 by a coalition of labor unions, community advocacy groups, and remnants of the New Party. The WFP describes itself as a grassroots, multiracial party of working people coming together across our differences to make our nation work for the many, not the few.²⁵ Unlike DSA, it operates as an independent left political party, although primarily at the state and local level, with more than 52,000 members and chapters in 14 states and Washington, DC. Its ideological orientation has been described as social democratic, left-wing populist, democratic socialist, progressive, and quasi-Marxist. However, its official platform emphasizes bread and butter issues, such as good paying jobs, raising the minimum wage, access to healthcare, universal paid sick days, mitigating the student debt crisis, progressive income taxation, funding for public education, alternative energy, and environmental justice. Despite operating as an independent political party, the WFP until recently has typically endorsed progressive Democrats, although it has begun to run its own candidates with a limited degree of electoral success in Connecticut and New York. In a February 2015 special election, Edwin Gomes won a seat in the Connecticut State Senate to become the first person in the nation to win a state legislative seat running solely as a nominee for the WFP.²⁶ In the same year, the New York WFP ran 111 candidates and won 71 local offices.²⁷ In 2017, Joshua M. Hall won a special election for the Connecticut House of Representatives and became the second person to win a state legislative seat as a nominee for the WFP. The WFP also endorsed Bernie Sanders in his campaign for US President.²⁸

The Black Socialists of America (BSA) was established in 2017 as a "coalition of anti-capitalist, internationalist Black Americans who believe in the core principles of Socialism as defined by Karl Marx," although their strategy is also heavily influenced by the works of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon.²⁹ The BSA defines itself as a nonsectarian organization "made up of people who identify as many different things under the 'Hard Left' umbrella," although they "do not support ... insurrectionists."³⁰ Instead, the BSA views its primary mission as building "dual power" through direct economic action. The BSA defines dual power as "two powers, one proletarian (democratic) and

²⁵See, <https://workingfamilies.org/>.

²⁶Keila Torres Ocasio, "Former State Sen. Gomes Reclaims Senate Seat," available online at: <https://www.ctpost.com/local/article/Former-state-Sen-Gomes-reclaims-Senate-seat-6099859.php>.

²⁷Associated Press, "Working Families Party Goes Local to Broaden Reach," (November 19, 2015), available online at: <https://www.craigslist.com/article/20151120/POLITICS/151129991/new-york-s-working-families-party-goes-local-to-broaden-reach>.

²⁸Alexander Burns and Maggie Haberman, "Working Families Party Endorses Bernie Sanders for President," *The New York Times* (December 8, 2015), available online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/politics/first-draft/2015/12/08/working-families-party-endorses-bernie-sanders-for-president/>.

²⁹Black Socialists of America #BlackSocialists.US; <https://blacksocialists.us/about>. The BSA's main recommended reading is Frederick Engels, *The Principles of Communism* (1847), the original first draft of what became *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), see, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/11/prin-com.htm>.

³⁰<https://blacksocialists.us/about>.

one capitalist, coexisting and competing for legitimacy during the transition away from Capitalism.³¹ The BSA argues that “to build democratic ‘proletarian power’, we need to build alternative, democratic institutions that reinforce one another and, more broadly, a democratic economic base.” Thus, its primary mission is to build a national network of federated worker self-directed enterprises (cooperatives and communes) that incrementally withdraw labor from the capitalist system and that directly build a socialist economy within the womb of capitalism.

While Black Lives Matter (BLM) is not nominally a socialist organization, it was founded in 2013 “to build local power and to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes.” BLM sponsors protests against police killings of black people, while advocating against racial profiling, police brutality, and racial inequality in the US criminal justice system.³² BLM was originally focused on social media campaigns, but some BLM activists expressed concerns that the movement was overly focused on legislative remedies for police violence³³ so it has now embraced a diversity of tactics strategy as necessary to survive in a world where black lives are “systematically targeted for demise” and where members of black communities confront “deadly oppression” on a daily basis.³⁴ Indeed, BLM is perhaps best known at this point for its presence at the riots in Ferguson, Missouri and Baltimore, Maryland.³⁵

Similarly, while also not strictly socialist, the national Women’s March was first organized in 2017 in response to the election of Donald J. Trump as President of the US. In 2019, the event’s organizers posted a Women’s Agenda that included ending violence against women and femmes, ending state violence, immigrant rights, disability rights, racial justice, environmental justice and LGBTQIA rights. While nominally a peaceful march, its disruptive activities resulted in the arrest of 575 people on June 28, 2018, when participants peacefully, but illegally, occupied the Hart Senate Office Building to protest family separations at immigrant detention facilities.³⁶ Only a few months later, 293 people were arrested for again illegally occupying the Hart Senate Office Building in a protest co-sponsored by the Women’s March to protest the nomination and confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh to the US Supreme Court.³⁷

³¹<https://blacksocialists.us/dual-power-map>.

³²Conor Friedersdorf, “How to Distinguish Between Antifa, White Supremacists, and Black Lives Matter,” *The Atlantic* (August 31, 2017), available online at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/08/drawing-August>, available online at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/08/drawing-distinctions-antifa-the-alt-right-and-black-lives-matter/538320/>.

³³John Eligon, “One Slogan, Many Methods: Black Lives Matter Enters Politics,” *The New York Times*, (November 19, 2015), available online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/19/us/one-slogan-many-methods-black-lives-matter-enters-politics.html>; Molly McKitterick, “Frustration Lies Behind ‘Black Lives Matter,’” *VOA News*, (August 12, 2015), available online at: <https://www.voanews.com/usa/frustration-lies-behind-black-lives-matter>.

³⁴<https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>. See, for example, Marc Lamont Hill and Todd Brewster, *Nobody: Casualties of America’s War on the Vulnerable, from Ferguson to Flint and Beyond* (New York, NY: Atria Books, 2017).

³⁵DeRay Mckesson, *On the Other Side of Freedom: The Case for Hope* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2019).

³⁶<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/womens-march-protesters-call-end-family-separation-capitol/story?id=56240419>.

³⁷<https://www.cnn.com/2018/10/04/politics/kavanaugh-protests-us-capitol/index.html>. Similarly, the September 1, 2019 Straight Pride Parade in Boston, Massachusetts drew 200 supporters and 600 counter-protestors. According to news reports, “some protestors reportedly turned their anger toward the police toward the end of the rally, prompting scuffles, arrests, and the use of pepper spray.” Thirty-six counter-protestors were arrested and charged with disorderly conduct, unlawful possession of a dangerous weapon, and assaulting officers,” see, Josie Harvey, “The Boston Straight Pride Parade Actually Happened and People Were Not Happy,” available online at: <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/the-boston-straight-pride-parade-actually-happened-and-people-were-not-happy/ar-AAGC06>.

One of the most prominent movements on the American left is Antifa, which first emerged in the US in the late 1980s as Anti-Racist Action (ARA). Mark Bray has described the Antifa movement as “an illiberal politics of social revolutionism applied to fighting the Far Right, not only literal fascists.” He notes that “some antifa groups are more Marxist while others are more anarchist or antiauthoritarian,” although he finds that most antifa groups in the US have gravitated toward anarchism.³⁸ Importantly, Bray emphasizes that “antifa should not be understood as a single-issue movement. Instead it is simply one of a number of manifestations of revolutionary socialist politics (broadly construed)” as most antifa activists also spend time on other forms of left-wing political activity, such as labor organizing, squatting, environmental activism, antiwar mobilization, and migrant solidarity.³⁹

In terms of tactics, Bray observes that:

the vast majority of antifascist tactics involve no physical violence whatsoever. Antifascists conduct research on the Far Right online, in person, and sometimes through infiltration; they dox them, push cultural mileux to down them, pressure bosses to fire them, and demand that venues cancel their shows, conferences, and meetings; they organize educational events, reading groups, trainings, athletic tournaments, and fund-raisers; they write articles, leaflets, and newspapers, drop banners, and make videos; they support refugees and immigrants, defend reproductive rights, and stand up against police brutality. But it is also true that some of them punch Nazis in the face and don't apologize for it.⁴⁰

Bray concludes that “violence represents a small though vital sliver of anti-fascist activity,”⁴¹ although in cities such as Portland, Oregon and Berkeley, California the “clashing demonstrations [between Antifa and Alt-Right groups] have become bloody riots.”⁴²

The increasing violence of the Far Right against peaceful activists, including armed intimidation, anonymous threats, and public beatings has increasingly spawned a network of armed community defense organizations, such as the John Brown Gun Club, Redneck Revolt, and the Socialist Rifle Association. The magnitude of the right-wing threat to socialist political activity within the framework of liberal democracy was brought home to a national audience by the Charlottesville, Virginia Unite the Right Rally, where as one writer puts it:

... they saw neo-Nazis and members of the ‘alt-right’ and KKK beating protesters. They witnessed white supremacist terrorism as a man drove his vehicle into a crowd of protesters, murdering activist Heather Heyer. They watched the police escort white supremacists to their vehicles but stand by as protesters were beaten. And they watched armed groups like Antifa and Redneck Revolt protect the church where Cornell West was speaking, making sure clergy members made it safely to their car.⁴³

³⁸Mark Bray, *Antifa: The Antifascist Handbook* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House Publishing, 2017), p. xv.

³⁹Ibid., xvi.

⁴⁰Ibid., 169.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Shane Burley, “Portland Anti-Fascist Coalition Show Us How We Can Defeat the Far Right,” *Truthout* (August 20, 2019), available online at: <https://truthout.org/articles/portland-anti-fascist-coalition-shows-us-how-we-can-defeat-the-far-right/>; “UC Berkeley cancels ‘alt-right’ speaker Milo Yiannopoulos as thousands protest,” *The Guardian*, (February 2, 2017), available online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/01/milo-yiannopoulos-uc-berkeley-event-canceled>.

⁴³Erin Goudreau, “Thank Your Local Antifa,” *Montana Kaiman* (September 4, 2017), available online at: http://www.montanakaimin.com/opinion/thank-your-local-antifa/article_b8f48910-9193-11e7-9c9f-a38a1242910a.html.

Cornell West later reported that Redneck Revolt and their antifa allies “saved his life” in Charlottesville.⁴⁴ The same groups later formed an alliance with BLM to provide community self-defense in support of Confederate monument removal in Charlottesville, Virginia. In a similar vein, Redneck Revolt, the John Brown Gun Club, and the Socialist Rifle Association are increasingly invited to anti-fascist and anti-racist rallies to provide security against right wing violence and aggression, particularly when local police are often unwilling to intervene against right-wing activists.⁴⁵

Redneck Revolt was founded in June 2016 and now has 37 chapters in 21 states from coast to coast.⁴⁶ It defines itself as “a national network of community defense projects from a broad spread of political, religious, and cultural backgrounds. It is a pro-worker, anti-racist organization that focuses on working class liberation from the oppressive systems that dominate our lives.” In states where it is legal to practice armed community defense, many branches choose to become John Brown Gun Clubs for the purpose of “training ourselves and our communities in defense and mutual aid.” Redneck Revolt explicitly opposes white supremacy on the grounds that:

the greatest threat to those that pull the political and economic strings in this society is a unified resistance movement among poor and working class people ... In the moments when white working people have looked beyond their skin color and have worked alongside movements of poor and working class people of all races, the power of the ruling elite has been the most directly threatened.⁴⁷

Redneck Revolt identifies itself as an organization of (mostly white) working class and poor people, who are opposed to white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism, and the wars of the rich. Redneck Revolt also stands “against the Nation-State ... which came into existence to protect the propertied classes and keep us working people poor and without power, often using varying types of standing armies to enforce laws which disproportionately impact the poor.” Redneck Revolt is organized to act as an above ground militant formation for community defense that believes “in the Right of Militant Resistance.” Redneck Revolt “believes in using any and all means at our disposal to gain our freedom ... We believe in the inherent right of every individual and community to defend themselves from those who exploit or oppress them.” Finally, Redneck Revolt believes in the necessity of revolution, which it defines as “a complete restructuring of society to provide for the survival and liberty of all people ... a world where no one is without food, shelter, water, or any other means of survival.”⁴⁸

Similarly, the Socialist Rifle Association (SRA) was founded in Kansas in October of 2018. It has approximately 2,000 members organized into 52 local chapters that operate in 33 states.⁴⁹ It claims that one-third of this membership is LGBTQ. The SRA defines itself as

⁴⁴Levi Van Sant, “A Redneck Revolt? Radical Responses to Trumpism in the Rural US,” *Open Democracy* (April 16, 2018), available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/redneck-revolt-radical-responses-to-trumpism-in-rural-us/>.

⁴⁵Kim Kelly, “If Others Have Rifles, We’ll Have Rifles: Why US Leftist Groups are Taking Up Arms,” *The Guardian* (July 22, 2019), available online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/jul/22/if-others-have-rifles-well-have-rifles-why-leftist-groups-are-taking-up-arms>; Maria Aurelio, “Showdown in Portland: The Cops Side with the Fascists (As Usual),” *Left Voice* (August 19, 2019), available online at: <https://www.leftvoice.org/showdown-in-portland-the-cops-side-with-the-fascists-as-usual>.

⁴⁶<https://www.redneckrevolt.org/contact>.

⁴⁷<https://www.redneckrevolt.org/about>.

⁴⁸<https://www.redneckrevolt.org/principles>; See, also, Jules Bentley, “Arming the Left,” *Antigravity Magazine* (November 2018), pp. 1–10.

⁴⁹<https://socialistra.org/chapters/>.

“an educational organization dedicated to providing the working class with the information they need to be effectively armed for self and community defense.” Its goal is “to provide an alternate to the mainstream, toxic, right-wing, and non-inclusive gun culture that has dominated the firearms community for decades” in the United States.⁵⁰ Its mission “is to uphold the right of the working class to keep and bear arms and maintain the skills necessary for self and community defense.”⁵¹ The SRA describes itself as a multi-tendency association that welcomes “any of the following: working class, progressive, anarchist, socialist, communist, eco-warrior, animal liberator, anti-fascist, anti-racist, anti-capitalist, PoC, LGBTQ+, or anyone else who is interested in learning about firearms and modern self-defense.”⁵² The SRA encourages its members “to oppose fascism in all its forms” and to “stand in solidarity with our comrades who engage in direct actions against fascist organizations.” However, the SRA has declared that it is: “... not a militia and we do not condone our members engaging in violence on our behalf. We believe the best way for our organization to oppose fascism is through education, training, and community building.”⁵³

Toward a Revolution in Permanence

The brief organizational profile above is by no means a comprehensive list of left-wing political organizations and social movements in the United States, but it does convey the diversity of organizations now operating on the US left, as well as the diversity of tactics being promoted by those organizations. Similarly, during the Revolutions of 1848, Marx and Engels were actively involved in both parliamentary and revolutionary activity that ranged from publishing a newspaper and political pamphlets, to purchasing arms for Belgian workers, lobbying left-wing delegates elected to the German National Assembly, organizing a national tax strike and mutiny of the Prussian landswehr, to defending against lawsuits brought against them by local prosecutors in Cologne. During this time, Marx was expelled by government authorities (1848–1849) from Paris, Brussels, and Cologne (and from Paris a second time) until he finally immigrated to London in August of 1849, where he reconstituted the Central Committee of the Communist League that he thought had been insufficiently prepared for the Revolution of 1848 in Germany.

Nowhere is the dialectic of parliamentary politics and revolutionary activity described with more clarity than in Marx’s and Engels’ “Address to the Central Authority of the League,” which they delivered in London to the newly reconstituted Central Committee of the Communist League (March 1850) for the purpose of outlining a strategy they called the “Revolution in Permanence.”⁵⁴

In their address to the new Central Committee, Marx and Engels reiterated the principle that the first stage of a socialist revolution would be a democratic revolution led by the bourgeoisie with mass support from the urban petit-bourgeoisie and the rural peasantry – all of whom are fundamentally attached to the institution of private property and who view the

⁵⁰<https://www.socialistra.org/about>.

⁵¹<https://socialistra.org/chapters/>.

⁵²<https://www.socialistra.org/about>.

⁵³<https://www.socialistra.org/about>. The SRA’s introductory reading list consists of Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*; Bhaskar Sunkara, *The ABC’s of Socialism* (London, UK: Verso, 2016); and Rudolf Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice* (Martin Secker and Warburg, Ltd., 1938).

⁵⁴Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, “Address to the Central Authority of the League,” *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 10 (Marx-Engels 1849–1851) (London, UK: Lawrence and Wishart, 1978), pp. 277–87.

primary role of the state as the protection of private property. Thus, democratic revolutions throughout the world would initially facilitate the development of capitalism and with it the quantitative development of productive forces and the qualitative development of the proletariat necessary to building a socialist movement. However, this meant that the rising proletariat would initially operate politically within the legal framework of bourgeois liberal democracy and within an economic system structured by private property and competitive markets. These limitations led Marx and Engels to ask what was a socialist movement to do politically within the legal framework of a bourgeois democracy designed to defend and reproduce the capitalist mode of production?

First, Marx and Engels insisted that workers must build an independent socialist or workers' party even if its initial electoral prospects were doubtful. They argued that socialists should contest every electoral district possible. They argued that a pro-workers candidate should:

... put up alongside the bourgeois-democratic candidates, that they should consist as far as possible of members of the League [i.e., be communists], and that their election is promoted by all possible means. Even where there is no prospect whatsoever of their being elected, the workers must put up their own candidates in order to preserve their independence, to count their forces, and to lay before the public their revolutionary attitude and party standpoint.⁵⁵

Marx's concept of electoral politics was that workers and socialists must independently contest capitalism from within the bourgeois political system but, on this point, Marx was also adamant that communists:

... must not allow themselves to be seduced by such arguments of the democrats as, for example, that by so doing they are splitting the democratic party and giving the reactionaries the possibility of victory. The ultimate purpose of all such phrases is to dupe the proletariat.⁵⁶

Marx's and Engels' argument echoes with a contemporary resonance, where the independent left in the United States is routinely chastised by the Democratic Party establishment for running and voting for "third-party" candidates that ostensibly throw the election from the democratic party of the petit-bourgeois to the conservative party of big capital, but Marx and Engels counter that such arguments are designed to restrain electoral politics within the limitations of capitalism. In contrast, Marx and Engels argue that the purpose of electoral participation in a bourgeois democracy is not necessarily to win elections, although this happens on occasion, but to use elections as a legal platform for disseminating a socialist issue agenda.⁵⁷ Furthermore, by articulating an independent socialist agenda, socialist

⁵⁵Ibid., 284.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Marx and Engels articulate a socialist policy agenda in their ten-point minimum program, which included a heavily graduated or progressive income tax, abolition of the right of inheritance, abolition of child labor, free public schools for all children, the creation of a national bank to direct monetary policy and capital investment, the nationalization of key transportation and communications industries, such as railroads and the postal service, and public investment in new state and cooperative enterprises to facilitate full employment, see, Marx and Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," p. 505. These demands were soon expanded to include universal male suffrage (at age 21), salaries for members of Parliament so that workers could serve in office, universal arming of the people, free legal services, curtailment of the right of inheritance, the abolition of consumption taxes, nationalization of all roads, railway, and passenger steamship lines, and the complete separation of Church and state in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Demands of the Communist Party in Germany," *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 7 (Marx and Engels 1848), pp. 3-7. *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, pp. 5, 4, would later build on these demands to argue that socialism and democracy are not distinguished by the one being the means and the other the end, but rather "both are means to the same end," which is "the abolition of every kind of exploitation and oppression, be it directed against a class, a party, a sex, or a race."

candidates can expose the petit bourgeois democratic party's commitment to capitalism above the interests of the working class. The goal is not to demonstrate that individual bourgeois democrats are fundamentally pro-capitalist as opposed to pro-worker, but to expose the entire bourgeois democratic party as a capitalist party. Finally, Marx's position was that if communists patiently held firm to their party line, in time, objective conditions – sparked by an economic crisis and fueled by the continual waffling and betrayal of workers by the petit-bourgeois democratic party – would drive the working class toward the independent workers' party at critical historical conjunctures.⁵⁸ If there was no independent workers' party, there was nothing to draw workers in a revolutionary direction during these critical conjunctures; there was just disaffection and alienation that could lead to acquiescence and despair or to misdirected outbursts of anger.

Nevertheless, absent a revolutionary conjuncture, Marx proposed that communist delegates elected to national assemblies should work to “compel the democrats to interfere in as many spheres as possible of the hitherto existing social order, to disturb its regular course, and to compromise themselves [i.e., the democrats] as well to concentrate the utmost productive forces, means of transport, factories, railways, etc., in the hands of the state.” Marx was convinced that periodic economic and financial crises would force the state to seize critical sectors of capital, such as railroads, the postal service, armaments industries, and central banks as instruments of national policy. Marx suggested that workers' elected deputies “must carry to the extreme the proposals of the democrats, who in any case will not act in a revolutionary manner but in a merely reformist manner, and transform them into direct attacks on private property.”⁵⁹ How was one to accomplish this goal? Marx and Engels suggested that:

... if the petty bourgeois propose purchase of the railways and factories, the workers must demand that these railways and factories should be simply confiscated by the state without compensation as being the property of reactionaries. If the democrats propose proportional taxation, the workers must demand progressive taxation; if the democrats themselves put forward a moderately progressive taxation, the workers must insist on a taxation with rates that rise so steeply that big capital will be ruined by it; if the democrats demand the regulation of state debts, the workers must demand state bankruptcy.⁶⁰

Marx's and Engel's advice is easily transferred to a contemporary politics.

If the Democratic Party effectively nationalizes General Motors, Citibank, and the American International Group as an emergency response to the 2008 financial crisis, then the socialists propose that the state permanently retain its ownership share in these corporations. If the federal government proposes to buy toxic mortgage backed assets held by banks, then the socialists should propose distributing that same money to mortgagees so they can meet their mortgage obligations. If the Democratic party proposes to let the Trump income tax reductions expire in 2025, then the socialists should instead propose a wealth tax on billionaires and an increase in the top marginal income tax rate to seventy percent.

⁵⁸While opposing opportunism (that is, compromising with the bourgeois democratic party), Marx also emphasized that the workers' party should not engage in political adventurism by acting prematurely and without the active support of the masses. Thus, he reiterated a principle established in *The Communist Manifesto* that communists were opposed to plots and conspiracies, which aside from always failing, provide a pretext for government authorities to arrest workers and to suppress their organizations.

⁵⁹Marx and Engels, “Address to the Central Authority of the League,” p. 286.

⁶⁰Ibid.

However, Marx was clear that it would only be possible to oppose the “treachery” of petit-bourgeois democrats, if “from the first hour of victory” the workers are “armed and organized.”⁶¹ As he had done in Germany in 1848, Marx called for an “armed proletariat” that would serve as the military wing of the workers’ party and challenge the capitalist state from the outside even as its elected deputies challenged it from the inside. Marx called for “the arming of the whole proletariat with rifles, muskets, cannon, and munitions” and he concludes that “workers must try to organize themselves independently as a proletarian guard with commanders elected by themselves and with a general staff of their own choosing.” Marx went on to argue that “arms and ammunition must not be surrendered on any pretext; any attempt at disarming must be frustrated, if necessary by force.”⁶² Importantly, Marx warns that armed proletarians must never put themselves at the command of the established state authority, but instead become the military wing “of the revolutionary community councils which the workers will have managed to get adopted” during a revolutionary crisis. In this manner, the communists and the working class can enforce “conditions as difficult and compromising as possible” upon bourgeois democrats. Marx was not necessarily calling for an armed insurrection, but he was saying that the mere presence of an armed proletariat would pressure bourgeois democrats into making radical concessions in an effort to mitigate the possibility of an armed insurrection and it would serve as a self-defense unit against state and vigilante violence during mass demonstrations. Furthermore, instead of opposing the “so-called excesses” of a revolutionary movement, Marx and Engels actually defend acts of “popular revenge against hated individuals or public buildings that are associated only with hateful recollections.” Marx and Engels would no doubt support the illegal and forceful destruction of Confederate monuments, but even propose that “such instances must not only be tolerated but the leadership of them taken in hand.”⁶³

This is exactly the position adopted by Redneck Revolt and the Socialist Rifle Association, and it is the position articulated in a now influential pamphlet, entitled *The Coming Insurrection* (2007). The anonymous authors of this pamphlet, writing as The Invisible Committee, argue that:

An insurrection is more about taking up arms and maintaining an ‘armed presence’ than it is about armed struggle. We need to distinguish clearly between being armed and the use of arms. Weapons are a constant in revolutionary situations, but their use is infrequent and rarely decisive at key turning points ... That said, the prospect of Iraq-style urban guerilla warfare, dragging on with no possibility of taking the offensive, is more to be feared than to be desired. The *militarization* of civil war is the defeat of insurrection.⁶⁴

While some commentators have dismissed these arguments as the enthusiasm of a young and immature Marx and Engels enthralled by the events of 1848, it is nevertheless true that even as late as 1874, Marx was still convinced that:

⁶¹Ibid., 283.

⁶²This exact quote is inscribed on a sticker sold by the Socialist Rifle Association.

⁶³Marx and Engels, “Address to the Central Authority of the League,” p. 283. Mao Tse-tung, “Problems of War and Strategy (November 1938),” *Selected Works*, Vol. 2 (Peking, CN: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), p. 225, similarly argues that “political power grows out of the barrel of a gun. ... According to the Marxist theory of the state, the army is the chief component of state power. Whoever wants to seize and retain state power must have a strong army.”

⁶⁴The Invisible Committee, “The Coming Insurrection,” pp. 84–85, available online at: http://tarnac9.files.wordpress.com/2009/04/thecominsur_booklet.pdf.

... as long as the other classes, above all the capitalist class, still exist, and as long as the proletariat is still fighting against it (for when the proletariat obtains control of the government its enemies and the old organisation of society will not yet have disappeared), it must use forcible means, that is to say, governmental means; as long as it remains a class itself, and the economic conditions which give rise to the class struggle and the existence of classes have not vanished they must be removed or transformed by force, and the process of transforming them must be accelerated by force.⁶⁵

What Marx and Engels envision is a wide-ranging class struggle that includes everything from electoral politics to armed self-defense, and it is a class struggle that will last for the entire duration of bourgeois democracy. For this reason, Marx and Engels call their political strategy a "Revolution in Permanence."⁶⁶ They argue that even where workers win universal suffrage and liberal political rights, communists will still have to continuously exert both internal and external pressure on state officials by demanding "guarantees for the workers" and "if necessary they must wring these guarantees by force."⁶⁷ Marx was still making the same point shortly before his death when in an 1880 letter to Henry Mayers Hyndman discussing the British Reform Bills, the 10-hour day, and other labor reforms, Marx cautioned against putting too much faith in peaceful parliamentary reforms. Marx reminded Hyndman that "every pacific concession" of the English ruling classes "has been wrung from them by 'pressure from without.'"⁶⁸

Marx's reference to "pressure from without" is what contemporary historians and social movement theorists now call the radical flank effect. The term was recently introduced by the sociologist Herbert H. Haines, who concludes that during the US civil rights movement "the turmoil which the militants created was indispensable to black progress and indeed, black radicalization had the net effect of enhancing the bargaining position of mainstream civil rights groups and hastening many of their goals." Haines argues that this phenomenon is not limited to the US civil rights movement, but "has implications for any social movement which is composed of moderate and radical factions."⁶⁹ This conclusion is bolstered by the work of other scholars who have similarly concluded, based on historical evidence, that militant activity on the fringes of social movements actually increases the bargaining power of moderates working within the established political system, while it simultaneously smashes institutions that reproduce existing inequalities.⁷⁰ On this point, Zinn agrees that nonviolence is always preferable to violence

⁶⁵ Karl Marx, "Notes on Bakunin's Book *Statehood and Anarchy* (April 1874-January 1875)," *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 24 (Marx and Engels 1874–1883), p. 517.

⁶⁶ Lars T. Lih, "Democratic Revolution in Permanenz," *Science & Society* 76:4 (2012), pp. 433–62.

⁶⁷ Marx and Engels, "Address to the Central Authority of the League," p. 283. Lenin, "Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution," pp. 23–24, likewise recognized that a bourgeois democratic revolution "will not weaken but strengthen the domination of the bourgeoisie which at a certain juncture will inevitably go to any length to take away from the Russian proletariat as many of the gains of the revolutionary period as possible."

⁶⁸ Karl Marx, "33 Marx to Henry Mayers Hyndman in London [London December 8, 1880]" *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 46 (Marx and Engels 1880–1883), p. 49. Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1972 [1906]), p. 153, makes a similar point: "The history of England affords more than one example of a Government giving way when numerous demonstrations against its proposals took place, even though it was strong enough to repel by force any attack on existing institutions. It seems to be an admitted principle of Parliamentary Government that the majority cannot persist in pursuing schemes which give rise to popular demonstrations of too serious a kind."

⁶⁹ Herbert H. Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream, 1954–1970* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), pp. 1–10. Similarly, Francis Fox Piven, *Challenging Authority: How Ordinary People Change America* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), pp. 23–25.

⁷⁰ Robert F. Williams, *Negros with Guns*, edited by Marc Schleifer (New York, NY: Marzani & Munsell, 1962); Robin D.G. Kelly, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley, CA:

as a tactic, but he also observes that social injustices are not always traceable to a particular law or institution. Consequently, he observes that some of society's worst injustices are not the result of specific laws, but of systemic failures "so woven into the American society that the only way to get at them is to attack the fabric at any vulnerable point."⁷¹ While Marx and Engels occasionally discuss specific mass demonstrations by workers, particularly in England, it is Kautsky, Sorel, and Luxemburg who actually "filled in" the tactical space between parliamentary politics and armed insurrection with the concepts of the political strike, the general strike, and the mass strike, respectively.

Parliamentary Tactics Are Not Enough

As noted in the introduction, Marx speculated in 1872 that in mature liberal democracies, such as the US, England, and Holland, it might be possible for workers to "achieve their aims by peaceful means"⁷² and this is certainly the gist of Peter Gay's homage to Bernstein.⁷³ Marx's nearly off-hand statement was accorded great weight in the development of Bernstein's parliamentary version of democratic socialism. Bernstein came to oppose the use of revolutionary political violence, because he concluded that universal suffrage and democratic elections had emerged as a substitute for violent revolution by the late 1890s. In his seminal work on *Evolutionary Socialism*, Bernstein states unequivocally that the "universal franchise is, from two sides, the alternative to a violent revolution ... social democracy cannot further this work better than by taking its stand unreservedly on the theory of democracy – on the ground of universal suffrage with all the consequences resulting therefrom to its tactics."⁷⁴

Engels' 1895 introduction to a new German edition of Marx's *The Class Struggles in France* (1850) was also referenced frequently by Bernstein to legitimate calls for a peaceful transition to socialism primarily through parliamentary means.⁷⁵ In Engels' 1895 introduction to *Class Struggles*, he observes that the decades following the Revolutions of 1848 had "completely transformed the conditions under which the proletariat has to fight. The mode of struggle of 1848 is today obsolete from every point of view."⁷⁶ The first transformation noted by Engels was the explosive growth of capitalism, which had steadily increased the size of the proletariat to the point

University of California Press, 1995); David S. Cecelski and Timothy B. Tyson (eds), *Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and Its Legacy* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Akinyele Omowale Umoja, *We Will Shoot Back: Armed Resistance in the Mississippi Freedom Movement* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013).

⁷¹Zinn, *Disobedience and Democracy*, p. 37.

⁷²Marx, "On the Hague Congress," p. 254. What has also been omitted by those who quote this passage is that Marx went on to state: "That being true we must also admit that in most countries on the Continent, it is force that must be the lever of our revolutions; it is force which will have to be resorted to for a time in order to establish the rule of the workers."

⁷³See, Peter Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism: Eduard Bernstein's Challenge to Marx* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1952), p. 7 who argues that the basic dilemma of Bernstein's political theory is that "a democratic Socialist movement that remains faithful to its principles may never achieve power." However, Gay went on to argue incorrectly that these "apprehensions were in large measure unfounded" (*Ibid.*, 8).

⁷⁴Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism*, p. 145. Elsewhere, Bernstein dismisses the right of revolution as a "purely speculative right" (*Ibid.*, 197) and a "meaningless phrase" (*Ibid.*, 218).

⁷⁵Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism*, pp. xxiv-xxviii, 25, 205. Pierre Birnbaum, "Universal Suffrage, the Vanguard Party, and Mobilization in Marxism," *Government & Opposition* 20:1 (1985), pp. 56–58 correctly points out that Engels' well-known passage from the 1895 Introduction, along with Marx's 1872 speech at The Hague, are the textual references "from which all 'revisionist' interpretations of Marxism are derived." Similarly, Gronow, *On the Formation of Marxism*, pp. 159–60.

⁷⁶Frederick Engels, "Introduction to Karl Marx's *The Class Struggles in France, 1848–1850* (1895)," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 27 (London, UK: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), p. 510.

that it constituted a majority of society and could, therefore, realistically hope to conquer political power through the ballot box if led by a well-disciplined socialist party. The second transformation was the simultaneous development of the modern state, particularly its military, police, and surveillance capabilities.

With respect to the first transformation, Engels reminded readers that "*The Communist Manifesto* had already proclaimed the winning of universal suffrage, of democracy, as one of the first and most important tasks of the militant proletariat."⁷⁷ Engels concludes that with the German workers' successful utilization of universal suffrage "an entirely new method of proletarian struggle came into operation"⁷⁸ and with that transformation international leadership of the socialist movement had shifted from France to Germany. With respect to the second transformation, Engels concludes that due to the development of the modern state's military capabilities "rebellion in the old style, street fighting with barricades, which decided the issue everywhere up to 1848, had become largely outdated."⁷⁹ He goes on to observe that "the time of surprise attacks, of revolutions carried through by small conscious minorities at the head of unconscious masses, is past"⁸⁰ and, at any rate, he notes that "a real victory of an insurrection over the military in street fighting, a victory as between two armies, is one of the rarest exceptions."⁸¹

Moreover, Engels concludes that since 1848 there had been numerous improvements in military armaments, tactics, and professionalization, which are "all in favor of the military," while "on the other hand, all the conditions on the insurgents' side have grown worse."⁸² Following the publication of Bernstein's *Evolutionary Socialism* (1899), which called attention to these passages by the so-called mature Engels, Marxist political theory rapidly splintered into parliamentary socialism and revolutionary communism, in part, as a result of the ensuing debate about whether illegal or even violent political tactics continued to be necessary or efficacious. Sorel wryly summarized this division in his *Reflections on Violence* (1906) with the observation that "Parliamentary socialists no longer entertain the idea of insurrection ... they teach that the ballot-box has replaced the gun."⁸³

Engels' 1895 introduction to *The Class Struggles in France* seems to make a compelling case for parliamentary politics as the only realistic alternative to the previous reliance on revolutions initiated as armed insurrections, except that Bernstein's use of Engels' introduction was highly selective in its appropriation of favorable passages. First, Engels' essay was written specifically for the German Social Democrats at a particular point in time, but it was not necessarily meant as a generalizable claim that parliamentarism and legal tactics would displace the use of illegal or even violent tactics at all times and places in the future. In this respect, Engels observes that in 1895 German Social-Democracy was in "a special situation" by having become the largest, most disciplined, and electorally powerful socialist party in the world.⁸⁴ Consequently, insofar as the German Social Democrats

⁷⁷Ibid., 515–16.

⁷⁸Ibid., 516.

⁷⁹Ibid., 517.

⁸⁰Ibid., 520.

⁸¹Ibid., 517.

⁸²Ibid., 518–19.

⁸³Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, p. 54. For example, Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism*, p. 101 states that "one can think of this conquest [of political power] in various ways: by the path of parliamentary struggle, turning the right to vote to good account, or by the path of force by means of a revolution."

⁸⁴Engels, "Introduction to Karl Marx, *The Class Struggles in France, 1848–1850* (1895)," p. 521.

were currently “thriving far better on legal methods than on illegal methods,” Engels feared that “a clash on a big scale with the military, a bloodbath like that of 1871 in Paris” would halt or even reverse the surging electoral fortunes of the Social Democrats.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, in 1879, Engels had also expressed his concern that “this legal agitation . . . made some people believe that it was no longer necessary to do anything else in order to obtain the final victory of the proletariat.”⁸⁶

In fact, Engels marveled that the German Social Democratic Party had tripled its votes since the passage of Bismark’s Anti-Socialist Laws (1878–1890),⁸⁷ which temporarily left the party “without press, without external organization and without the right of combination or meeting.”⁸⁸ In other words, the party’s most rapid electoral growth had occurred when it was operating as an illegal organization and despite the state’s vigorous repressive efforts to short-circuit its growth. The German Anti-Socialist Laws were allowed to expire in 1890 not because there was any agreement among the ruling parties that socialists should be allowed to compete in elections, but because socialists continued to organize and propagandize successfully *despite it being illegal*. It was illegal political activity that forced the law to change. Parliamentary tactics and illegal tactics were not mutually exclusive in this case, but Engels was cautioning German socialists to avoid *violent* tactics that would draw them into a losing confrontation with the German army and provide the state with an excuse to adopt even more repressive measures against socialists. This was a purely tactical consideration, specific to a time and place, and not a theoretical repudiation of non-parliamentary tactics.

Indeed, Engels asked readers of his 1895 introduction to *Class Struggles*: “Does that mean that in the future the street fight will play no further role?” He answers:

Certainly not. It only means that the conditions since 1848 have become far more unfavorable for civilian fighters and far more favorable for the military. In the future, street fighting can, therefore, be victorious only if this disadvantageous situation is compensated for by other factors. Accordingly, it will occur more seldom at the beginning of a great revolution than at its later stages, and will have to be undertaken with greater forces.⁸⁹

Sorel was the first person to call attention to these passages in his critique of parliamentary socialism by correctly noting that “in the German edition a passage has been left out, the social-democratic leaders considering certain phrases of Engels not politic enough.”⁹⁰ Similarly, Shurer reiterates the fact that in 1895 “Engels had made it clear that in the long run the use of violence and force by social democracy against imperial Germany was by no means unlikely.” However, by “bowdlerizing his text the executive of the German socialist

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 522.

⁸⁶ Frederick Engels, “The Anti-Socialist Law in Germany. – The Situation in Russia (March 30, 1879),” *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 251.

⁸⁷ Germany introduced universal suffrage in 1866 and by 1877 the Marxist led Social Democratic Party was winning nearly a half million votes. In 1878, the German Reichstag passed the Anti-Socialist Law, which was extended four times through 1890. The legislation did not outlaw the Social Democratic Party directly, but it was designed to cripple the organization by banning any group or meeting that spread social democratic principles, by outlawing trade unions, and by closing of 45 newspapers. The measures were evaded by having socialist candidates run as independents, by relocating party publications outside of Germany, and by distributing verbatim publications of Reichstag speeches, which were privileged speech with regard to censorship. Despite these restrictions, the party’s vote grew to 1.4 million in 1890, see, Vernon L. Lidtke, *The Outlawed Party: Social Democracy in Germany, 1878–1890* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966).

⁸⁸ Engels, “Introduction to Karl Marx’s *The Class Struggles in France, 1848–1850* (1895),” p. 515.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 519.

⁹⁰ Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, p. 75.

party made Engels appear to be an advocate of peaceful progress by parliamentary means alone.⁹¹ Instead, what Engels actually argues is that the armed phase of socialist revolution will now occur in the final stages of the class struggle, rather than being a catalytic event at the beginning of an insurrection. However, for this very reason, Engels seems to be hearkening back to his and Marx's call in 1850 for an armed and organized proletariat capable of deploying "greater forces" with more professional discipline than was possible in 1848 or 1871. In this respect, a central component of the revolution in permanence was to use this time to build proletarian battalions outside the control of the bourgeois democratic state. Nevertheless, Engels also cautions revolutionaries not to romanticize and exaggerate the role of the armed barricades of 1848 or the armed confrontations of the Paris Commune. In suggesting that the workers' disadvantageous military situation could be compensated for by other factors, he notes that even in past proletarian revolts the insurgents viewed armed confrontation as a supplement to parliamentary tactics and to mass social movements that were designed to break the will of the ruling class and its state officials, but not necessarily as a tactic that could overpower the state with military force. As Engels notes:

For them [the revolutionaries] it was solely a question of making the troops yield to moral influences ... If they succeed in this, then the troops fail to act, or the commanding officers lose their heads, and the insurrection wins ... The most that the insurrection can achieve in actual tactical practice is the correct construction and defense of a single barricade ... Hence the passive defense is the prevailing form of fight: the attack will rise here and there, but only by way of exception ... Even in the classic time of street fighting, therefore, the barricade produced more of a moral than a material effect. It was a means of shaking the steadfastness of the military. If it held out until this was attained, then victory was won; if not, there was defeat.⁹²

In other words, Engels saw armed insurrection as merely one instrument of revolution or the continuation of class struggle by other means.⁹³ The goal was to exhaust and frustrate the state's army, to paralyze its commanders with indecision, to render military forces inoperative because of politically imposed rules of engagement, and to cause the troops themselves to vacillate or desert, or even mutiny to the side of the revolutionaries. Moreover, Engels argued that in those cases where armed insurrections had been at least partially successful in the past it was often because "there stood between the insurgents and the military a civic militia [that is, national guard], which either directly took the side of the insurrection, or else by its lukewarm, indecisive attitude caused the troops likewise to vacillate, and supplied the insurrection with arms into the bargain."⁹⁴

Furthermore, and regardless of the situation in Germany in 1895, Engels made it clear that "of course, our foreign comrades do not renounce their right to revolution. The right to revolution is, after all, the only real 'historical right', the only right on which all modern states without exception rest." He went so far as to declare that the right of revolution is "incontestably recognized in the general consciousness."⁹⁵ Engels even seems to invoke John Locke in claiming that all modern states are:

⁹¹H. Shurer, "The Russian Revolution of 1905 and the Origins of German Communism," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 39:93 (1961), pp. 459–60.

⁹²Engels, "Introduction to Karl Marx's *The Class Struggles in France, 1848–1850* (1895)," pp. 517–18.

⁹³Cf. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Michael Howard and Peter Paret (eds), (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), Book 8.B., p. 605.

⁹⁴Engels, "Introduction to Karl Marx's *The Class Struggles in France, 1848–1850* (1895)," p. 517–18.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 521.

... a product of contract; of the contract, firstly, of the princes with one another [i.e., the Treaty of Westphalia] and, secondly, of the princes with the people [i.e., constitutions]. If one side breaks the contract, the whole contract falls to the ground; the other side is then also no longer bound ... If, therefore, you break the constitution of the Reich, Social-Democracy is free, and can do as it pleases with regard to you. But it will hardly blurt out to you today what it is going to do then.⁹⁶

The “then” that Engels refers to is a decisive battle between the capitalist class and the proletariat. Engels’ statements invoke the illegitimacy of state violence when confronted by an uprising of the majority of the people. On the other hand, when confronted with the violence of state power, revolutionaries may have no choice but to act in self-defense, but as Engels wryly observes to his readers, there is no reason to advertise that fact in advance or to elevate it to a theoretical principle if it is not required at present.

Smash the State

Engels had actually discussed the nature of this decisive battle four years earlier in his 1891 introduction to Marx’s *The Civil War in France* (1870–71).⁹⁷ Marx and Engels changed their thinking about the conquest of political power as a result of the Paris Commune, but this change of thinking did not lead them to abandon the idea that social revolution was still the strategic endgame of socialist politics. In *The Civil War in France*, Marx concludes that the Paris Commune “was essentially a working-class government, the produce of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of Labour.”⁹⁸ What was different about the Paris Commune, according to Engels, was that the working class had created a non-state political form of self-governance, while in 1848 it had merely been “a power in the [capitalist] state” as a result of newly granted universal suffrage.⁹⁹

Moreover, despite the fact that the proletariat was armed in 1848, the capitalist state’s repressive apparatus also remained fully intact. What was essentially a bourgeois government with a working class presence inside it was able to ensure that it retained control of the state repressive apparatus. The conclusion to 1848 in France was therefore “a blood bath among defenseless prisoners” and Engels warns his readers that “it was the first time that the bourgeoisie showed to what insane cruelties of revenge it will be goaded the moment the proletariat dares to take its stand against the bourgeoisie as a separate class, with its own interests and demands.”¹⁰⁰ At critical moments of confrontation with the working class, the capitalist state will resort to force, even against an unarmed proletariat, to maintain and reproduce existing relations of class exploitation and political subordination.

What Marx saw in the Paris Commune, as compared to 1848, was a new political form that “breaks the modern state power.”¹⁰¹ In *The Civil War in France*, Marx reviews the

⁹⁶Ibid., 523.

⁹⁷Ibid., 179–81.

⁹⁸Karl Marx, “The Civil War in France. Address of the General Council of the International Workingmen’s Association,” *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 22 (Marx-Engels 1870–1871) (London, UK: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986), p. 334.

⁹⁹Frederick Engels, “Introduction Karl Marx’s *The Civil War in France* (1891),” Vol. 27 (Marx-Engels 1870–1871) (London, UK: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), p. 181.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Marx, “The Civil War in France. Address of the General Council of the International Workingmen’s Association,” p. 334.

specific legal and political measures taken to break the power of the capitalist state, but the important thing theoretically was his recognition that:

... the proletariat cannot ... simply lay hold of the existent state body and wield this ready-made agency for their own purpose. The first condition for the holding of political power, is to transform the traditional working machinery and destroy it as an instrument of class rule ... the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for their own purpose. The political instrument of their enslavement cannot serve as the political instrument of their emancipation.¹⁰²

Engels reiterated this critical theoretical breakthrough in his 1891 introduction to Marx's *The Civil War in France* by noting that:

From the outset the Commune was compelled to recognize that the working class, once come to power, could not manage with the old state machine; that in order not to lose again its only just conquered supremacy; this working class must, on the one hand, do away with the old repressive machinery previously used against itself, and, on the other, safeguard itself against its own deputies and officials, by declaring them all, without exception, subject to recall at any moment.¹⁰³

This would seem to suggest that the role of parliamentary politics is not to seize the (capitalist) state with an electoral majority, but to fracture it from within – to break away pieces of the state apparatus and to paralyze segments of the state apparatus at strategic times so it cannot move against the masses. Notably, Engels does not differentiate between authoritarian states and democratic republics when it comes to smashing the capitalist state. He observes that all modern state officials have “in the course of time, in pursuance of their own special interests, transformed themselves from the servants of society into the masters of society, as can be seen, for example, not only in the hereditary monarch, but equally also in the democratic republic.”¹⁰⁴ While in 1872 Marx had speculated about the possibility of a peaceful parliamentary transition to socialism in the US, by 1891 Engels was singing a different tune about the US. In 1891, Engels singles out the US as the most extreme example of elected officials pursuing their own special interests at the expense of society as a whole and, thereby, constituting themselves as a state above society, rather than a representative of it. Engels observes that:

Nowhere do ‘politicians’ form a more separate, powerful section of the nation than in North America ... It is well known that the Americans have been striving for thirty years to shake off this yoke, which has become intolerable, and that in spite of all they can do they continue to sink ever deeper in this swamp of corruption. It is precisely in America that we see best how there takes place this process of the state power making itself independent in relation to society, whose mere instrument it was originally intended to be ... we find here two great gangs of political speculators, who alternately take possession of the state power and exploit it by the most corrupt means and for the most corrupt ends – and the nation is powerless against these two great cartels of politicians, who are ostensibly its servants, but in reality exploit and plunder it.¹⁰⁵

Engels’ commentary resonates in the present day, but his key point is that at decisive moments in the class struggle, whether pursued peacefully or by violence, he did not see

¹⁰²Karl Marx, “Second Draft of The Civil War in France,” *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 22, p. 533.

¹⁰³Engels, “Introduction Karl Marx’s The Civil War in France (1891),” p. 189.

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

any significant difference *in how the ruling class responds* to working class demands, and regardless of whether the state is autocratic or democratic. Indeed, Engels chastises self-righteous liberals and bourgeois democrats who:

... think they have taken quite an extraordinarily bold step forward when they have rid themselves of the belief in hereditary monarchy and swear by the democratic republic. In reality, however, the state is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another, and indeed in the democratic republic no less than in the monarchy; and at best an evil inherited by the proletariat after its victorious struggle for class supremacy, whose worst sides the proletariat, just like the Commune, cannot avoid having to lop off at the earliest possible moment, until such time as a new generation, reared in new and free social conditions, will be able to throw off the entire lumber of the state on the scrap-heap.¹⁰⁶

Thus, it was absolutely necessary to smash the capitalist state, regardless of its political form. Marx's and Engels' point was that socialism is not just the conquest of political power by the working class – defined as seizing control of the existing state – it is a social revolution that requires the working class “slowly to press forward from position to position in a hard, tenacious struggle” but this did not mean that in the long march to socialism force and violence would not play some role at critical points in the social revolution.¹⁰⁷

The Doctrine of the Long Civil War

Kautsky was the anointed intellectual heir to Engels and, as such, he continued to build out the idea of a revolution in permanence as the slow movement forward from position to position in a hard tenacious struggle.¹⁰⁸ On this point, Kautsky agreed with Bernstein that the transition to socialism would be a long evolutionary process, but he did not believe it would be an imperceptible incremental process of political and economic reform achieved primarily by parliamentary means. First, Kautsky did not think that Bernstein understood the theory of evolution, which had been developed in the life sciences and applied by analogy to societal change. Evolution occurs through rapid mutations and not through a slow process of small imperceptible changes. Thus, Kautsky defines a social revolution “as a more or less rapid transformation of the foundations of the juridical and political superstructure of society arising from a change in its economic foundations.” Kautsky chastises parliamentary socialists, such as Bernstein, for taking “the sting away” from the concept of social revolution.¹⁰⁹

A social revolution may not be violent, but it most assuredly will not be peaceful and legal and, at some point, it will occur rapidly as contradictions between the forces and relations of production intensify and as tensions between the political superstructure and economic substructure reach a breaking point. For this reason, Kautsky thought that the process of social revolution was better described as “a long drawn out *civil war*, if one does not necessarily join to these last words the idea of actual slaughter and battles.” Kautsky describes the transition from capitalism to socialism as a long civil war, because he did not believe that

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 190.

¹⁰⁷Engels, “Introduction to Karl Marx’s *The Civil War in France* (1895),” *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 27, p. 512.

¹⁰⁸This idea is consistent with Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York, NY: International Publishers, 1971), pp. 110, 229–35, 238–39, who argues that the class war had shifted from a tactical war of manoeuvre to a long-term strategic war of position.

¹⁰⁹Karl Kautsky, *The Social Revolution* (Chicago, IL: Charles H. Kerr, 1910 [1902]), p. 6.

a socialist revolution would any longer take the form of an uprising “of the populace against the government,” but would more likely take the form of a direct “struggle of one portion of the people against another.”¹¹⁰

Thus, Kautsky does not distinguish between reform (legal) and revolution (illegal) based on the tactics used by class actors, but on the class origins and purpose of the action. Kautsky suggests that “measures which seek to adjust the juridical and political superstructure of society, to changed economic conditions, are reforms if they proceed from the class which is the political and economic ruler of society.”¹¹¹ The ruling class and its mode of production are not static social and economic structures. As a mode of production undergoes development, its ruling class must periodically make adjustments to the legal and political superstructure to accommodate and facilitate its own extended reproduction and political domination.¹¹² Political and legal reform is a normal part of political development in any mode of production. However, these adjustments (that is, reforms), as proposed by the ruling class, are never designed to alter the fundamental structure of the mode of production, but to perpetuate the relations of economic exploitation and political domination that establish it as the ruling class.¹¹³

In contrast, political measures can be considered revolutionary only “if they proceed from the class which has been economically and politically oppressed and who have now captured political power and who must in their own interest more or less rapidly transform the political and juridical superstructure and create new forms of social cooperation”¹¹⁴ as had been the case in the Paris Commune. Kautsky explicitly asks the question of whether bourgeois democracy can:

... provide the foundation for a gradual, imperceptible transformation of capitalism into Socialism without any violent break with existing things if we but presuppose the conquest of political power by the proletariat? ... that revolution is rendered superfluous by democracy and, therefore, whether we have sufficient democracy in all civilized countries to make possible a peaceable revolutionless development.¹¹⁵

Kautsky rejected this idea as an idyllic fantasy, because it assumes that “the proletariat, is growing and increasing in strength, while the other side, the bourgeoisie, remains immovable fixed to the same spot.”¹¹⁶ However, this imagined state of affairs is not true for several reasons. First, the capitalist state is also increasing in political power as a result of its expanding bureaucratic, financial, military, police, and surveillance capacities. As the capitalist state grows stronger, Kautsky was convinced that the rule of the capitalist class, and the maintenance of the capitalist system, would come to depend more and more on the deployment of state power through its various apparatuses. He

¹¹⁰Ibid., 87–88.

¹¹¹Ibid., 8.

¹¹²This concept is similar to the more contemporary social structure of accumulation theory (SSAT) and regulation theory (RT). For a general overview, see, David M. Kotz, “A Comparative Analysis of the Theory of Regulation and the Social Structure of Accumulation Theory,” *Science & Society* 54:1 (1990), pp. 5–28.

¹¹³For example, see G. William Domhoff, *The Power Elite and the State: How Policy is Made in America* (New York, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1990); Karl Kautsky, *The Class Struggle*, (trans.) by William E. Bohn (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1971), p. 91, argues that “the exploited classes should not overrate the social reforms, and should not imagine that through them the existing conditions can be rendered satisfactory ... Nine-tenths of the proposed reforms are not only useless, but positively injurious to the exploited classes.”

¹¹⁴Karl Kautsky, *The Social Revolution* (Chicago, IL: Charles H. Kerr, 1910 [1902]), pp. 8–9.

¹¹⁵Ibid., 65.

¹¹⁶Ibid., 66–67.

was also convinced that as the capitalist class came to depend more and more on the state “so much more stubbornly will it cling to its privileges and all the less will it be inclined to grant concessions [i.e., reforms].”¹¹⁷

Second, Kautsky’s critique of parliamentary socialism was that it only took into account the rise and growing strength of the working class, but it failed to give proper weight to the fact that the capitalist class also grows in strength with the development of capitalism. The capitalist class constantly develops new levers of power to counter the working class and the socialist movement, including the fact that even in liberal democratic republics, the capitalist class and its state managers are prepared to use force and violence to prevent a successful working class and socialist movement. Kautsky points out that as the proletariat gains in strength, the capitalist class will likewise be gaining in strength and it “is goaded on by every new advance of the proletariat to develop new powers, and to discover and apply new methods of resistance and repression.” Consequently, instead of being able to narrow the class struggle to parliamentary tactics, Kautsky anticipates “the organization of ever larger fighting bodies ... the development and application of ever more powerful resources for conflict” and “a continuous widening of the battle field” between labor and capital. Instead of a peaceful and almost imperceptible transition to socialism, Kautsky expects “a reproduction of the struggle upon ever wider stages, and a deepening of the consequences of every victory and every defeat.”¹¹⁸

In this respect, Kautsky reminds us that the distinction between reform and revolution is not synonymous with the distinction between legal and illegal tactics or between nonviolent and violent tactics. He observes first that “every juridical and political measure is a force measure which is carried through by the force of the State” even when adopted by parliamentary means. Consequently, to the extent that socialists are able to pass legislation through parliamentary means its implementation will still require the use of force. Even legal means are backed by the threat of violence when exercised by the state and it is violence against the proletariat when exercised by a capitalist state. But legality is just as equally violence against the capitalist class when exercised by a peacefully elected socialist government. In other words, the law *is* an exercise of violence or the threat of violence.

Kautsky further notes that “neither do any particular forms of the application of force, as, for example, street fights, or executions, constitute the essentials of revolution in contrast to reform. These arise from particular circumstances, are not necessarily connected with revolutions, and may easily accompany reform movements.”¹¹⁹ Thus, for example, women’s suffrage was a political reform adopted by parliaments (and not a revolution), but it was adopted in Great Britain and the US only after years of militant, illegal, and even violent protest by suffragettes.¹²⁰ Women’s suffrage was adopted as a legal reform, but only because of mass disruption and even targeted violence.

¹¹⁷Ibid., 30.

¹¹⁸Ibid., 67.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 7.

¹²⁰Sylvia Pankhurst and Emmeline Pankhurst, *The Suffragette: The History of the Women’s Militant Suffrage Movement* (New York, NY: Sturgis and Walton Co., 1911); Frank Meeres, *Suffragettes: How Britain’s Women Fought and Died for the Right to Vote* (The Hill, UK: Amberley Publishing, 2009). Similarly, on the transition from nonviolent moral suasion to the tactical use of violence among Northern black abolitionists in the United States, see, Kellie Carter Jackson, *Force and Freedom: Black Abolitionists and the Politics of Violence* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

As a result, Kautsky asks the same question that Engels had asked seven years earlier: “Is the time of social revolution past or not? Have we already the political conditions which can bring about a transition from capitalism to socialism without political revolution, without the conquest of political power by the proletariat, or must we still expect an epoch of decisive struggles for the possession of this power and therewith a revolutionary epoch?”¹²¹ As with Engels, Kautsky’s answer is simple:

We cannot slowly undermine the dominion of the exploiting class without this class being conscious of this, and consequently arming themselves and using all their powers to suppress the strength and influence of the growing proletariat. The more, however, that the ruling classes support themselves with the State machinery and misuse this for the purposes of exploitation and oppression, just so much more must the bitterness of the proletariat against them increase, class hatred grow, and the efforts to conquer the machinery of the State increase in intensity.¹²²

Kautsky was convinced that parliamentary victories by working class parties, supported by the growing power of the trade unions, would inevitably lead to counter-measures against the unions designed to undermine the social base of working class parties. He was convinced that as capital continued its corporate consolidation into cartels and trusts, capitalists “will find it only too easy” to defeat economic strikes and to undermine efforts to organize unions. Unrestrained by government, Kautsky argued that the new corporations will “use their forces recklessly and more harshly than the government itself, which no longer stands above them, but beneath them.”¹²³ Kautsky expected these new “unions of employers” (that is, corporations) to “threaten the unions” in multiple ways, while these attacks on organized labor would be supported by the state even if only by ignoring them.¹²⁴ In a contemporary context, labor activists and legal scholars in the US have increasingly documented how US labor relations is systematically regressing back to pre-New Deal conditions precisely because of the corporate class war against labor and the state’s complicity in dismantling labor protections.¹²⁵ In this sense, the class war once again spills out of the courts and regulatory agencies, and back into trade unions, the shop floor, the media, schools and universities, the streets, and every institution of civil society.

Kautsky makes clear that he considers parliamentarism, civil liberties, cooperatives, trade unions, and reform legislation to be “of incalculable value to the proletariat,” but he considers them to be “insignificant as means to avoid a revolution.” Quite the contrary, national parliamentary struggles, winning control of municipal governments, and the workplace struggles of trade unions are important struggles, because they prepare the political battlefield for “a higher form of the revolutionary struggle.”¹²⁶ Elections and

¹²¹Kautsky, *The Social Revolution*, p. 35.

¹²²*Ibid.*, 36–37.

¹²³*Ibid.*, 86–87.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, 69. Also, see, Gronow, *On the Formation of Marxism*.

¹²⁵See, Patricia Cayo Sexton, *The War On Labor and the Left: Understanding America’s Unique Conservatism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1991). For example, Richard W. Hurd, *Assault on Workers’ Rights* (Washington, DC: AFL-CIO, 1994) documents “employers’ blatant contempt for the rights of workers” and employers’ “obsession with retaining unilateral and total authority over their employees,” available online at: <https://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/laborunions/34/>; Julius G. Getman, “Boeing, the IAM, and the NLRB: Why US Labor Law is Failing,” *Minnesota Law Review* 315 (2014), p. 1652 documents employers successful political efforts to roll back the rights of organized labor and to dismantle “the last remnants of the New Deal legislation that created the NLRB,” available online at: <https://scholarship.law.umn.edu/mlr/315>.

¹²⁶Kautsky, *The Social Revolution*, p. 80.

other forms of legal activity create breaches in the capitalist state, but Kautsky concludes that neither the economic nor the political development of capitalism “indicates that the era of revolution which characterizes the capitalist system is closed.”¹²⁷

If this is the case, then what is the purpose of elections and parliamentary activity? Kautsky echoes Marx’s and Engels’ earlier statement (1850, 1895) that elections “are a means to count ourselves and the enemy, and they grant thereby a clear view of the relative strength of the classes and parties, their advance and retreat. They prevent premature outbreaks and they guard against defeats ... So that the battle demands fewer victims, is less sanguinary and depends less upon blind chance.”¹²⁸ He also repeats Engels’ argument that democracy is “indispensable as a means of ripening the proletariat for the social revolution” by testing the strength of its organizations and by gaining experience in self-governance and administration, but Kautsky also reiterates that bourgeois democracy “is not capable of preventing this revolution.” However significant individual parliamentary reform measures may be for improving the lives of workers in the short-term, Kautsky argues that:

... they are much too insignificant to really restrict the dominion of capitalism and to bring about its imperceptible transition into socialism ... Democracy does not hinder the development of capital ... the end of this development can be nothing less than a great, decisive battle that cannot end until the proletariat has attained the victory.¹²⁹

This conclusion required Kautsky to ask another question: “What will be the precise form under which the decisive battles between the ruling class and the proletariat will be fought out? ... What weapons will be at the service of the proletariat?”¹³⁰ First, Kautsky embraced the tactic of limited political strikes at strategically located choke points in the process of capitalist production, but he was not prepared to endorse Rosa call for mass strikes or to accede to Georges enthusiasm for the general strike.¹³¹ Kautsky explicitly rejects the syndicalist concept of a general strike on grounds that it is not:

necessary that the social revolution be decided at one blow; such probably was never the case. Revolutions prepare themselves by years or decades of economic and political struggle; they are accomplished amidst constant ups and downs sustained by the conflicting classes and parties; not infrequently they are interrupted by long periods of reaction.¹³²

Second, Kautsky suggests that capitalist development will open a variety of “social craters” in civil and political society that can be filled by working class organizations. The most obvious social crater, according to Kautsky, was “the decay of the internal political life” in bourgeois democracies and “the increasing decadence of Parliaments.” He observes that “the statesmanship of our rulers consists simply, not alone internally, but also externally, in placing every question upon the shelf and thereby increasing the number of unsolved problems.”¹³³ Kautsky contends that these unsolved problems – economic, social, cultural, political, and diplomatic – accumulate and compound over time, which leads to a general social crisis. Insofar

¹²⁷Ibid., 83. In the same section, Kautsky states that the pursuit of “social peace inside of the capitalist system is a Utopia.”

¹²⁸Ibid., 80–81.

¹²⁹Ibid., 81–82.

¹³⁰Ibid., 84.

¹³¹Stephen Eric Bronner, “Karl Kautsky and the Twilight of Orthodoxy,” *Political Theory* 10:4 (1982).

¹³²Ibid., 90. Kautsky emphasizes that “I am not using the idea of a general strike in the sense that the anarchists and the French trade unionists use the word” (Ibid.).

¹³³Ibid., 95.

as the political system is the center of integration of a mode of production, its inability to fulfill its general maintenance function will register in an accumulation of multiple crises.¹³⁴ Thus, the political decadence and indecisiveness of the governing class could eventually generate a catastrophic implosion of the capitalist state and open the door to a social revolution.¹³⁵ Kautsky argues that “such a revolution may assume many forms, according to the circumstances under which it takes place. It is by no means necessary that it be accompanied by violence and bloodshed.”¹³⁶ Yet, at the same time, Kautsky wryly reminds us that “the great majority of the owners and exploiters are bitterly opposed to socialism” and, consequently, their demise will be “neither peaceful nor regular ... This is especially the case with the rich,” who “might be deprived, also, of their present ease and comfort.”¹³⁷

Thus, while Bernstein saw parliamentary tactics as a way to effect a peaceful transition to socialism, Kautsky was more reserved in his conclusions. Responding directly to Marx’s 1872 speech in Amsterdam about the possibility of a democratic transition, Kautsky said: “It remains to be seen whether Marx’s expectations will be realised.”¹³⁸ Thus, in his recent analysis of Karl Kautsky’s political and economic thought, Jukka Gronow emphasizes that there was an important difference between Bernstein and Kautsky in how they received Engels’ 1895 introduction to Marx’s *Class Struggles in France*. Bernstein was eager to cite Engels’ text to confirm his claim that the ballot box had replaced revolutions, but in Kautsky’s reading of the passage, Engels had legitimated parliamentary tactics as a new form of class struggle, but he still believed that the transition to socialism would require revolutionary force, because socialism could not be realized merely by winning elections.¹³⁹

As Kautsky observed, it was just silly to believe that socialists could use bourgeois democracy – a capitalist state – to sneak up on the capitalist class reform by reform without provoking a reaction from that class. Indeed, Kautsky pointed out that in England, the US, and Holland – the countries that Marx identified as possible countries for a democratic transition to socialism – there were still “sections of the ruling classes whose inclinations to use force against the proletariat grow.”¹⁴⁰ Consequently, Kautsky argues, “it cannot to-day be foreseen how democracy in the various States will influence the forms which the conquest of political power by the proletariat will take, and how far it will avert the use of violent methods from both sides and promote the use of peaceful means.” However, he was certain that “in cases where the proletariat of a democratic State attains to power, one must reckon with attempts of the ruling classes to nullify by violence the realisation of democracy by the rising class.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁴Kautsky’s claim presages similar arguments by Jurgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1975) and Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes* (London, UK: Verso, 1978). See, also, James O’Connor, *The Meaning of Crisis: A Theoretical Introduction* (New York, NY: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

¹³⁵See, Jurgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1975). Similarly, Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, who is convinced that the decadence of the middle classes will necessitate a violent overthrow of capitalism and its governing class.

¹³⁶Kautsky, *The Social Revolution*, pp. 90–91.

¹³⁷*Ibid.*, 160, 173, 161–62.

¹³⁸Kautsky, *Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, p. 10.

¹³⁹Gronow, *On the Formation of Marxism*, p. 159.

¹⁴⁰Kautsky, *Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, p. 10.

¹⁴¹*Ibid.*, 8.

Reflections on Violence

In his *Reflections on Violence*, Sorel was even more forceful in his conclusion that socialists “would not allow themselves to be beaten without having used all the resources which the situation offered them” and that socialists should “not hesitate to make use of any weapon which might serve to develop to a great degree the spirit of the class war, seeing that efforts were being made to suppress it.”¹⁴² As with Kautsky’s critique of parliamentary socialism astutely calls attention to the fact that the binary distinction between legal and illegal tactics is a false dichotomy, because there is a great deal of political space between parliamentarism and an armed insurrection of organized proletarian battalions. Sorel saw a continuous spectrum of tactics with most revolutionary political activity occurring in the wide interstice between legality and illegality. Indeed, Sorel argues that most modern revolutions will originate in this interstice, particularly in various forms of the proletarian strike and the political general strike.¹⁴³

Sorel considered class war to be the fundamental principle of socialist tactics and nothing embodies this principle more than the various forms of strikes, which bring workers and citizens into direct confrontation with the capitalist class. Thus, in Sorel’s estimate, future revolutions will not begin as a confrontation between two armies, but the social revolution will build through a long period of preparation that results in ever larger and wider general strikes that eventually implode the capitalist system by withdrawing labor from capital and by directly seizing the means of production.¹⁴⁴ In the short term, Sorel echoes Marx’s and Engels’ earlier remarks (1850, 1895) by admonishing parliamentary socialists to remember that left-wing legislative representatives usually have little political leverage within a bourgeois republic unless there are “exceptional circumstances to buy their support with large concessions.” Consequently, Sorel contends that even where socialists succeed in electing large delegations to a national assembly, it is a great advantage to them if they can “bring outside pressure to bear on recalcitrant majorities which would appear to threaten the Conservatives with a formidable insurrection” – the so-called radical flank effect.¹⁴⁵ Indeed, Sorel claims that left-wing legislators understand quite well that it is never really “in their interest for the people to be quite calm; a certain amount of agitation suits them.”¹⁴⁶ However, parliamentary socialists will always insist that mass agitation be contained within the limits of legality and therefore controlled by politicians.

Sorel points out that parliamentary socialists have exaggerated conceptions of their own power to control political events, because a political strike can take on “a large number of forms: it might be peaceful and of short duration, its aim being to show the Government that it is on the wrong track, and that there are forces which could resist it; it might also be the first act of a series of bloody riots.”¹⁴⁷ Political strikes can take the form

¹⁴²Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, p. 157.

¹⁴³Ibid., Chap. IV on “The Proletarian Strike” and Chap. V on “The Political General Strike.”

¹⁴⁴Rodney L. Mott, “The Political Theory of Syndicalism,” *Political Science Quarterly* 37:1 (1922), pp. 25–40; Jack J. Roth, “Revolution and Morale in Modern French Thought: Sorel and the Sorelians,” *French Historical Studies* 3:2 (1963), pp. 205–23; David Beetham, “Sorel and the Left,” *Government and Opposition* 4:3 (1969), pp. 308–23.

¹⁴⁵Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, p. 171.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., 76.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., 171. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, In the US, see, William D. Haywood, *The General Strike* (Chicago, IL: I.W.W. Publishing Bureau, 1911). For a review of this concept, see, Wilfrid Harris Crook, *The General Strike* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1931).

of anything from individual factory walk outs to industrial strikes to a general strike of all workers in a city, a region, or a nation, to mass demonstrations against the government by an entire nation.¹⁴⁸ Strikes and demonstrations cannot indefinitely be controlled or directed by union officials, socialist politicians, or demonstration organizers, because there is simply no way to predict the development and outcome of a political strike. Moreover, a political strike is not solely in the hands of the strikers, trade union officials, or left-wing politicians. Its outcome is largely a consequence of how the capitalist class and the state repressive apparatus respond to the strikers.

In this regard, Sorel harbors little confidence in the pacific inclinations of the ruling class and its political servants and, thus, he claims that “every conflict which gives rise to violence becomes a vanguard fight,” because “each time they come to blows the strikers hope that it is the beginning of the great *Napoleonic battle* (that which will definitely crush the vanquished); in this way the practice of strikes engenders the notion of a catastrophic revolution.” Sorel was also convinced that the class war must culminate in a decisive battle between capital and labor – the general strike – and all lesser forms of the political strike are a training ground and preparation for this final conflict. Thus, Sorel dismissed parliamentary socialism as “a social policy founded on middle class cowardice, which consists in always surrendering before the threat of violence.”¹⁴⁹ In fact, Sorel’s position is consistent with statements in *Critique of the Gotha Program* (1875), where Marx criticizes the Lassalleans’ adherence to what he calls vulgar democracy. Marx defined vulgar democracy as a political theory “which sees the millennium in the democratic republic and has no suspicion that it is precisely in this last form of state of bourgeois society that the class struggle has to be fought out to a conclusion.” Marx condemned “this kind of democratism which keeps within the limits of what is permitted by the police and not permitted by logic.”¹⁵⁰

While the idea of a general strike may seem fanciful in an era of declining union density, as Kim Moody documents, in a new era of transnational supply chains a strike does not have to be general in order to have a generalized impact on a nation’s economy.¹⁵¹ First, global supply chains are particularly vulnerable at strategic choke points such as airports, seaports, railways, trucking, and warehousing, where union strength remains comparatively strong, and where any disruption ripples through the entire economy. Second, public sector strikes, where union strength is exceptionally strong in the US can literally fracture the state apparatuses and smash the state by shutting it down.

¹⁴⁸For historical examples, see, Janet L. Polasky, “A Revolution for Socialist Reforms: The Belgian General Strike for Universal Suffrage,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 27:3 (1992), pp. 449–66; Robert L. Friedheim and James N. Gregory, *The Seattle General Strike* (Seattle, MA: University of Washington Press, 2018); Carl Winslow, *Seattle General Strike: The Forgotten History of Labor’s Most Spectacular Revolt* (London, UK: Verso, 2019); Peter Taaffe, *1926 General Strike: Workers Taste Power* (London, UK: Socialist Books, 2006); Scott Nearing and Ellen Wilkinson, *The British General Strike: An Economic Interpretation of Its Background and Its Significance* (New York, NY: Vanguard Books, 1927); Sidney Fine, *Sit-Down: The General Motors Strike of 1936–37* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1969).

¹⁴⁹Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, p. 71.

¹⁵⁰Karl Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Program (May 1875),” *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 24 (Marx and Engels 1874–1883) (London, UK: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), p. 96. Perhaps not coincidentally, Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism*, p. 148 describes Lassalle as “much more logical than we are to-day” and cites him favorably for turning Marx against Marx (*Ibid.*, 27).

¹⁵¹Kim Moody, *On New Terrain: How Capital is Reshaping the Battleground of Class War* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2017).

The Mass Strike

Luxemburg agreed with Kautsky that the rise of trusts and cartels, coupled to imperialist expansion, was ushering in a new era of class war that would directly pit organized capital against organized labor.¹⁵² The capitalist state might intervene at strategic moments to reinforce the capitalist class, but otherwise the state operated in the background to maintain the political and legal conditions that would allow the capitalist class to wage class war under favorable conditions – the state prepared the battlefield to insure that the two classes confronted each other on asymmetrical terms.

Luxemburg too dismissed Bernstein's parliamentary socialism for claiming "that the class struggle would shrink to an exclusively parliamentary contest and that street fighting would simply be done away with" in the period of bourgeois democracy.¹⁵³ However, Luxemburg carried the concept of the political strike a step further than Kautsky, and even Sorel, by arguing that the Russian Revolution of 1905 had brought to an end "the exclusive dominion and long duration of the parliamentary period" of class struggle by demonstrating the efficaciousness of the mass strike as a political tactic.¹⁵⁴ She contends that the mass strike is now "the first natural, impulsive form of every great revolutionary struggle of the proletariat" and that as a new form of struggle it is "the sure symptom of a thorough-going internal revolution in the relations of the classes and in the conditions of the class struggle."¹⁵⁵

Luxemburg differentiates the mass strike from the general strike as that concept had been developed during the previous three decades by Bakuninists and syndicalists such as Sorel. The general strike presupposed that most workers would be organized into unions or syndicates that would prefigure non-capitalist and federal forms of economic self-governance by the working class. At an appointed time, the syndicate officials would declare a coordinated general strike of all the unions, directly seize the means of production, and declare an end to capitalism (and defend themselves by force if necessary). Luxemburg differentiates the mass strike from the general strike and the limited political strike in three ways.

First, one of the defining characteristics of the mass strike, as compared to the limited political strike or the general strike, is that it was not confined to a single union or industry or even to all unions. In fact, the true strength of a mass strike is that it sweeps up the mass of unorganized workers, as well as other classes, such as petit-bourgeois shopkeepers and craftsmen, the professional middle classes, artists and entertainers, and even the lumpenproletariat.¹⁵⁶ Consequently, the mass strike had the potential to mobilize an entire nation against the ruling class and to expose the state as something different from, and opposed to, the nation. The myth of the state as the representative of the nation was thus demystified and de-legitimated in practice by the mass strike. Luxemburg argues that in the

¹⁵²Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* (London, UK: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd. 1951 [1913]).

¹⁵³*Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁵⁴Rosa Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike: The Political Party and the Trade Unions* (New York, NY: Harper Torchbooks, 1971 [1906]), p. 11. Bronner, "Karl Kautsky and the Twilight of Orthodoxy," p. 584 argues that "the failure of the 1848 revolution created a situation in which the bulk of the SPD [in Germany] was concerned with actualizing the political form of a bourgeois state. This constrained their vision and prevented the majority of the party from developing new tactics for extending democracy into civil society or recognizing new offensive forms of proletarian organization such as the mass strike and the soviet."

¹⁵⁵Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike*, p. 72, 17.

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 29.

1905 Russian Revolution, it was armed proletarians at the barricades, who temporarily froze the Russian Army, but it was the mass strike that broke their ranks as many soldiers recognized that they were not acting on behalf of the nation they were sworn to defend. This was exactly the relationship between armed self-defense and mass action that Engels had described in 1895 as the future form of revolutionary activity.

Second, Luxemburg argues that “it is absurd to think of the mass strike as one act, one isolated action. The mass strike is rather the indication, the rallying idea, of a whole period of the class struggle lasting for years, perhaps for decades.”¹⁵⁷ In this respect, Luxemburg’s mass strike is the political form of Kautsky’s long civil war and it is not dissimilar to Sorel’s idea that a long series of escalating strikes, civil demonstrations, and riots would culminate in a social revolution. Luxemburg’s concept of the mass strike was also a continuation of Marx’s and Engel’s call for a revolution in permanence.

Finally, a major reason why Kautsky was never prepared to endorse Luxemburg’s idea of the mass strike, as opposed to the limited political strike, was precisely because the mass strike could not be directed or controlled by party and trade union officials. Luxemburg notes that “if the mass strike is not an isolated act but a whole period of the class struggle, and if this period is identical with a period of revolution, it is clear that the mass strike cannot be called at will.”¹⁵⁸ It is not subject to control and direction by political party or trade union officials, because it sweeps up whole layers of the proletariat and other sub-altern strata that are not subject to the jurisdiction of party and trade union bosses.¹⁵⁹ She observes that the 1905 “mass strike in Russia does not represent an artificial product of premeditated tactics on the part of the Social Democrats, but a natural historical phenomenon on the basis of the present revolution.”¹⁶⁰ She concludes that the mass strike is an endless ebb and flow of permanent revolutionary activity which consists of:

... political and economic strikes, mass strikes and partial strikes, demonstrative strikes and fighting strikes, general strikes of individual branches of industry and general strikes in individual towns, peaceful wage struggles and street massacres, barricade fighting – all these run through one another, run side by side, cross one another, flow in and over one another – it is ceaselessly moving, a changing sea of phenomena.¹⁶¹

The mass strike was not a single event called one day by a small group of party officials or union officials, but a long-term class strategy based on a series of prolonged challenges to the capitalist order. Unlike the general strike, the mass strike was more spontaneous. It might grow out of a limited political strike, or other types of political demonstrations, but it spread beyond the ability of trade union and party officials to direct or control it. While mass strikes are peaceful (and sometimes legal) by intention, Luxemburg concludes that the mass strike “in no way replaces brutal street fights or renders them unnecessary.” Instead, as with Engels and Kautsky, the mass strike reduces the street fight and armed insurrection to a final moment in the long period of civil war, but she is certain that street fights and armed insurrection will remain necessary acts of self-defense at critical junctures when confronted

¹⁵⁷Ibid, 45.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., 51.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., 66.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., 70.

¹⁶¹Ibid., 45.

with the violence of a faltering ruling class and its now illegitimate state.¹⁶² As with Engels, she argues that street fighting will no longer signal the beginning of a social revolution, as it had in 1848 or 1871, but would more likely occur toward the end of the long civil war as the capitalist class and other reactionary forces clung to political power through violence, but this also means that social movements must be prepared for that moment.

Conclusion

The writings surveyed in this article document that parliamentary socialists such as Bernstein advanced a highly selective reading of Marx's and Engels' later works that misconstrues their position on the use of illegal tactics and the necessity of armed self-defense. Marx and Engels did not see parliamentary politics and organized insurrection as mutually incompatible tactical choices, but instead they saw the two types of tactics as working in tandem, across a wide spectrum of tactics, to simultaneously put pressure on the capitalist state from within and from without toward the ultimate goal of smashing the state. However, following their direct experience with the Revolutions of 1848, Marx and Engels abandoned the idea of a quick strike led by small groups of armed insurgents and shifted to a long-term strategy they called revolution in permanence. Revolution in permanence required communists to engage in parliamentary and electoral politics, but it also included the organization of armed proletarian units. These units were supposed to provide leverage to left-wing representatives in national assemblies, but they were also viewed as a self-protection force that would come into play during political strikes and perhaps play a decisive role in the final stages of a social revolution.

However, as Marxist political theorists recognized after the death of Marx and Engels, there is a wide political space between parliamentary politics and armed insurrection. It is this interstice between parliamentary politics and armed insurrection where the revolution in permanence unfolds in a diversity of tactics that are both legal and illegal as well as nonviolent and violent. I have argued that Marx's and Engels' concept of a revolution in permanence was best captured by Kautsky's call for a long civil war and this idea was further elaborated by Sorel and Luxemburg. These theorists also advocated a range of political tactics that included the limited political strike, the general strike, civil demonstrations, riots, attacks on hated monuments and public buildings, street fighting, and the mass strike. These tactics may or may not be legal depending on the time and country, or the way in which these tactics are deployed by activists. Yet, all of the thinkers discussed in this article agree that whether these tactics are peaceful or violent depends to a great extent on how the ruling class and state officials respond to them. Political action may start peacefully and end violently not because of the demonstrators, but because of the police, or as Marx and Engels often pointed out, because of provocateurs financed by the ruling class and tolerated by the police, to foment violence and create a pretext for attacking and arresting demonstrators and strikers. They certainly all agreed that at critical historical conjunctures the

¹⁶²Ibid., 72. Charles F. Eliot, "Proletarian Revolution and the Mass Strike," *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly* 47:1 (1966), pp. 44–45, observes that Luxemburg blamed the failure of the 1892 Belgian general strike on the "exaggerated legalism" of the Belgian Labor Party and trade union leaders. Elsewhere, Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike*, p. 49, concludes that "in actual fact we see in Russia that almost every mass strike in the long run leads to an encounter with the armed guardians of the Czarist order, and therein the so-called political strikes exactly resemble the larger economic struggle. The revolution, however, is something other and something more than bloodshed."

ruling class could not be expected to step aside peacefully even in the face of an overwhelming parliamentary majority or mass demonstrations by the citizenry.

Consequently, I argue that while recent electoral successes by socialists in the US are encouraging and not to be dismissed cavalierly, there is also a well-documented history of the structural limitations of parliamentary socialism, which make it abundantly clear that a transition to socialism cannot be achieved by parliamentarism alone.¹⁶³ I also suggest that the American left is already well down the path of utilizing tactics that are nominally peaceful but disruptive and therefore illegal. At the same, other groups have emerged that explicitly advocate the necessity of armed self-defense in order to protect peaceful protestors from the vigilante violence of fascist, Neo-Nazi, and other right-wing provocateurs. This reality requires a forthright assessment of how disruptive (and illegal) tactics, as well as armed self-defense (and legal) tactics fit within a long-term political strategy of socialist transformation as we once again confront the predations of an unrestrained ruling class.

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¹⁶³Ralph Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism: A Study in the Politics of Labor* (London, UK: Allen & Unwin, 1961); Colin Leys and Leo Panitch, *The End of Parliamentary Socialism: From New Left to New Labor* (London, UK: Verso, 1997); David Coates (ed.), *Paving the Third Way: The Critique of Parliamentary Socialism* (London, UK: Merlin, 2003).