

Proletarian revolution and the crisis of modernity

German orthodox Marxism and French revolutionary syndicalism,
1889-1914

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I, Ken Cheng, confirm that confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This study develops a close-textual and comparative analysis of two influential doctrines of “proletarian revolution” that appeared during the Second International period (1889-1914): “German orthodox Marxism” and “French revolutionary syndicalism.” It considers the effect of the dramatic mass-organizational development of the European workers’ movement upon both doctrines – in particular, how this shaped the key concepts of “scientific socialism” and “direct action.” In this light, the first chapter of the study examines the relationship of both doctrines to “classical” Marxist and anarchist ideology. The main body of the study then outlines the historical development of both tendencies – their “formation” and “decomposition.” This analysis challenges prevailing historiographical interpretations of several significant revolutionary thinkers: on the Marxist side, Friedrich Engels, Karl Kautsky, and Rosa Luxemburg; on the syndicalist side, Fernand Pelloutier, Émile Pouget, and Georges Sorel. It also reframes the political history of two major pre-First World War institutions: the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* and the *Confédération générale du travail*.

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Introduction

This study will examine two influential doctrines of “proletarian revolution” that emerged during the period of the Second International (Socialist International, 1889-1914): namely, *German orthodox Marxism* and *French revolutionary syndicalism*. These doctrines are generally regarded as polar opposites. On one hand, orthodox Marxism advocated a parliamentary mode of revolutionary struggle, organized and led by a socialist workers’ party, and culminating in the proletarian seizure of political power. On the other, revolutionary syndicalism envisaged the overthrow of capitalist society through a general strike, motivated by economic interests rather than political values, and prepared for by a federation of autonomous *syndicats* (trade unions). These strategies were tied to rival institutions within the European workers’ movement: the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD, established 1875), which dominated the theoretical discussions of the Second International, and the *Confédération générale du travail* (CGT, established 1895), which was at the forefront of an anarchistic counter-tendency ostracized from the International.

Furthermore, whilst the orthodox Marxists rooted their revolutionary vision in Karl Marx’s dialectical theory of social development, which they labelled as “scientific socialism” (*wissenschaftlicher Sozialismus*), the revolutionary syndicalists placed their faith in the practical energy and creative spontaneity of the workers, encapsulated in the slogan of “direct action” (*action directe*). In short, the doctrines were philosophically opposed, seeming to stand at the “deterministic” and “voluntaristic” extremes of revolutionary theory. This can be linked to their main ideological forebears; orthodox Marxism and revolutionary syndicalism can be regarded as descendants of the “Marxist” and “anarchist” factions that caused the schismatic collapse of the First International (International Workingmen’s Association, 1864-1876). Their opposition has even been linked to a fundamental difference in “national temperament,” with

German “organization” and “discipline” contrasted to the “individualist” and “anarchic” French.¹

Given that these doctrines were diametrically opposed in both strategic and philosophical terms, sharing neither institutional nor ideological grounds, it may be asked why my analysis seeks to juxtapose and compare them. Here I would firstly argue that both doctrines confronted the same political-historical predicament – that is, the growth of the European workers’ movement to an unprecedented, mass-organizational scale during the late-nineteenth century. From the 1870s onwards, the workers’ movement was radically reshaped through the establishment of socialist parliamentary parties across Europe and a steady increase in trade-union membership and strike activity, further buttressed by advancements in the administrative and journalistic apparatuses of these organizations. We would expect the revolutionary doctrines of the Second International period to reflect the specific problems and potentialities raised by the transformative growth of the workers’ movement; furthermore, the SPD and CGT were generally recognized as world-leading examples of this general tendency. Accordingly, this study will approach German orthodox Marxism and French revolutionary syndicalism as *doctrinal expressions of the historic emergence of the European workers’ movement as a mass-organizational force*.

Furthermore, my analysis will attempt to show how this institutional aspect of both doctrines fundamentally shaped their visions of proletarian revolution. “Scientific socialism” and “direct action” are often regarded as absolute, monolithic, and somewhat simplistic revolutionary beliefs: on one hand, the conviction that proletarian revolution was a objective inevitability due to the laws of capitalist development; on the other, the conviction that the unmediated activity and organic association of the proletariat would suffice to overthrow

¹ Milorad M Drachkovitch, *Les socialismes français et allemand et le problème de la guerre, 1870-1914* (Geneva: Droz, 1953), 345.

capitalist society. As such, their textual manifestations are often approached as dogmatic assumptions or rhetorical strategies deployed by individual ideologues. However, by placing them in the context of the mass-organizational development of the revolutionary workers' movement, my analysis will attempt to demonstrate that both of these apparent revolutionary convictions were rooted in more complex, ambivalent, and fluid textual structures, through which "proletarian revolution" was implicitly conceptualized as a *sociopolitical mass-phenomenon*.

For obvious reasons, the concept of the "mass" or "masses" will be central to this analysis. The "mass" holds two broad aspects of potential significance in the context of revolutionary doctrine. Firstly, it may refer to the sociopolitical phenomenon of the "crowd," often associated with urban or industrial modernity, whose unique energies could either empower or imperil the revolutionary movement. Secondly, the "mass" may refer to a kind of literary problematic confronted by revolutionary theorists – that is, the task of "mass communication," of disseminating their ideas to a mass audience and adapting them for popular comprehension. These aspects of revolutionary "mass" politics both had a significant presence within the writings of German orthodox Marxism and French revolutionary syndicalism.

Both doctrines' conceptions of proletarian development were shaped by assumptions regarding the political and intellectual capacity of the social mass. Christian Borch has noted the attention given to "crowd and mass semantics" by a number of revolutionary theorists during the Second International period, which he links to the discipline of "crowd sociology" that emerged at around the same time; whilst sociological studies of the crowd were often the work of "conservative scholars" (such as Gustave Le Bon) who primarily sought "to diagnose [the crowd as] an alleged threat to bourgeois society," revolutionary discussions of mass action

“turned the crowd into a category that ... could be activated in the overthrow of the bourgeois order.”²

In the Second International context, faith in the revolutionary capacity of the proletarian masses is often identified with the advocates of spontaneous “mass strike” or “general strike” tactics – mainly represented by the revolutionary syndicalists and renegade Marxists who opposed the parliamentary orthodoxy of the SPD. From this perspective, the orthodox adherents of Social Democratic struggle were more conservative in their attitude towards the masses, believing them to require the party’s theoretical guidance and practical organization in order to achieve a revolutionary transformation of society. In seeking to bypass political mediation and thus elevate the autonomous activity of militant workers, the revolutionary syndicalists seemed to place greater trust in the revolutionary mass.

However, a complication must be introduced here. Many revolutionary syndicalists “displayed an open contempt for ... the crowd,” viewing the masses as impressionable and reactionary, particularly in terms of their acceptance of bourgeois-democratic political values.³ Syndicalist “direct action” was thus conceived as the work of an élite “conscious minority,” whose achievements would provide an imitable model and eventually awaken the passive majority of society. Conversely, the orthodox Marxists’ support for parliamentary tactics was partly rooted in the belief that the masses were capable of intellectual development, and that parliamentary democracy provided an apt platform for their social education and enlightenment. One of the key ideological meanings of “scientific socialism” was to link the adoption of Marxist theory on a mass scale to the cultural advancement of the modern proletariat.

In short, the ideological significance of the revolutionary “mass” was more complex than a matter of optimistic belief or cautious scepticism in its revolutionary capacity. It is

² Christian Borch, *The Politics of Crowds: An alternative history of sociology* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 89-90.

³ Jeremy Jennings, *Syndicalism in France: A study of ideas* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1990), 31.

necessary to distinguish between attitudes towards the *instinctive* capacity of the “spontaneous” mass on one hand, and the *intellectual* capacity of the “democratic” mass on the other. The orthodox Marxists doubted whether the instinctive action of the masses could achieve revolution, and therefore sought to foster its intellectual potential through Social Democracy. The revolutionary syndicalists believed that bourgeois democracy had deadened the intellect of the masses, and therefore sought to circumvent political speculation through spontaneous action.

Perceptions of how the masses should be addressed were also significant at a practical level. For many revolutionaries of the Second International period, their political work was centred around the task of “popularization” – whether this entailed theoretical vulgarization for a mass readership (for instance, adapting Marxism for the comprehension of workers) or the establishment of a propagandistic platform (for instance, using syndicalist organizations as a basis for propagating anarchist ideas). On one hand, Alfred Kelly has argued that the development of “scientific socialism” was partly a consequence of the orthodox Marxists seeking to exploit the spread of “popular Darwinism” amongst German workers, hoping to increase the appeal of Marxism through a “subtle infusion of Darwinian terminology.”⁴ On the other, the origins of syndicalist “direct action” are linked by Jean Maitron to an influx of French anarchists into the growing syndical movement during the 1890s, as they began to view the *syndicats* as a platform “for winning over the mass of workers to the anarchist cause.”⁵

The main context in which the doctrinal parameters of revolutionary popularization took shape was in “official” Marxist and syndicalist journals, most notably the SPD’s theoretical journal *Die neue Zeit* and the CGT’s organ *La Voix du peuple*. As will be seen throughout the course of analysis, the popularizing aims of such publications were not simply

⁴ Alfred Kelly, *The Descent of Darwin: The popularization of Darwinism in Germany, 1860-1914* (University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 123-24.

⁵ Jean Maitron, *Le mouvement anarchiste en France* [vol.1, “Des origines à 1914”] (Paris: Maspero, 1975), 279.

pragmatic in nature. Their editors – who were generally writers and theorists themselves, rather than administrative professionals – articulated literary-political strategies and standpoints that had a defining influence upon the development of Marxist and syndicalist doctrine. In short, the task of revolutionary popularization or mass communication had idealistic and imaginative as well as pragmatic or purely technical horizons; it entailed a certain conception of the contemporary social and intellectual milieu in which revolutionaries were seeking to create certain forms of worker culture.

This summary provides some initial co-ordinates for examining German orthodox Marxism and French revolutionary syndicalism in terms of the politics of the “mass,” adding a layer of complexity to the “proletarian” logics of “scientific socialism” and “direct action.” However, the points raised thus far have only accentuated the fundamental differences already recognized between these two tendencies. Their attitudes towards the masses, both as a sociopolitical entity and as an audience for revolutionary writing, seemed to reflect their respective emphases upon theoretical determinism and practical voluntarism as the basis for proletarian revolution. Furthermore, the sociopolitical figure of the “crowd” and the task of revolutionary “popularization” are clearly issues that have shaped revolutionary thought throughout its history, rather than concerns unique to the Second International period – even if the development of the workers’ movement might have led to a greater degree of attention being given to these issues. To fully grasp the mass-organizational *affinities* between the doctrines under analysis, a further aspect must be incorporated into my interpretive framework.

Here the crux of my reinterpretation will be to argue that the politics of the “mass” was not an external or supplementary addition to the essential doctrines of German orthodox Marxism and French revolutionary syndicalism, but a constitutive element of their visions of “proletarian revolution.” In most accounts, the logic of proletarian revolution is obviously tied

to the class identity or class development of the industrial working class; it is the perceived nature of this class, of its economic conditions and its political capacities, that would form the essence of the doctrine. From this perspective, attitudes towards the “mass” would seem to represent a kind of subjective embellishment, which introduces either a dogmatic or a rhetorical element into the objective evaluation of proletarian development. On one hand, subjective faith or scepticism regarding the instinctive or intellectual capacities of the “crowd” might be used to artificially buttress claims regarding the objective revolutionary force of the working classes. On the other, revolutionary “popularization” would seem to be a question, above all, of how the core theory of “proletarian revolution” can be successfully articulated and disseminated. To assert that this process could have revolutionary significance in itself would seem to imply that rhetorical persuasion could override the objective conditions of revolutionary class development.

However, this study will suggest that the orthodox Marxist and revolutionary syndicalist treatment of the “mass” should not be seen as a secondary or subordinate addition to the politics of “class,” but rather as an equally fundamental component of “proletarian revolution” as a conceptual structure. This argument will be elaborated more fully in the next chapter (which will examine the classical Marxist and anarchist conceptions of proletarian revolution), but an initial foothold is provided by Étienne Balibar’s analysis of the conceptual ambivalence within Marx’s writings “between *the proletariat as a class and the proletariat as the masses*.” For Balibar, the “vacillation” between these senses was linked to the question of whether the proletariat represented a “particular interest” or a “general interest.” Of course, proletarian consciousness represented a “particular” class standpoint insofar as it was antithetical to bourgeois-capitalist interests; for this reason, it was tied to the political maturation of the industrial working class. However, because the proletariat’s ultimate revolutionary task was to liberate the whole of society from the inherent antagonisms of “class

society,” it had to pass through – at some point in its development – a “radical loss of individuality ... and all inherited historical specificity,” such that its consciousness would become identical to the “general will” of the “masses.”⁶

As Balibar notes, one way in which this could occur was through the total immiseration of the proletariat to “the point when extreme exploitation has completely stripped the workers of all property”; in other words, at the point when the economic interests of the proletariat became identical with the “exploited” in general.⁷ Another possibility, however, was that the proletariat could develop a consciousness of the “general will” of society in the positive sense of becoming *socially enlightened*, without first having to reach an absolute state of immiseration. On one hand, the workers could develop a refined and comprehensive knowledge of social progress and its requirements. This knowledge would empower the proletariat to guide the process of social production in accordance with the “general interest.” On the other, the workers could elaborate a code of ethics based on the inherent values of productive labour and proletarian solidarity. This morality would provide a new “general” direction for society, superseding the decadent and parasitical values of bourgeois capitalism.

As will be seen, the notions of “scientific socialism” and “direct action” can be reinterpreted in this light – as modes of social enlightenment that emerge in the context of proletarian development. Furthermore, the perceived nature of the proletariat as (or in relation to) the social “mass” took on a defining significance in this context, because it could determine the parameters of its “enlightenment” – for example, whether the emergence of the “democratic mass” would help or hinder this process, or whether a particular form of “popularization” was required for the workers to comprehend social-scientific literature. The moral or intellectual enlightenment of the proletariat could thus replace absolute immiseration and suffering as the

⁶ Étienne Balibar, “The Vacillation of Ideology in Marxism”; *Masses, Classes, Ideas: Studies on politics and philosophy before and after Marx* (London: Routledge, 1994), 94.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

basis upon which proletarian-revolutionary doctrine claimed to represent the “general interest” of society. In other words, the justification of proletarian revolution was no longer solely that the proletarian class was the main victim and opponent of a capitalist system that also oppressed society in general (although this logic was certainly not abandoned by revolutionaries), but also that the proletarian *mass* – partly by virtue of its emergent institutions – was uniquely capable of comprehending, guiding, or leading the development of society, particularly at the level of production.

Clearly, this nexus of ideas can be linked to the distinctive, mass-organizational context of revolutionary doctrine during the Second International period. The most notable functions of the emergent workers’ organizations were: firstly, to represent the working class as a political force on the national stage; secondly, to agitate for ameliorative social reforms that would improve the workers’ condition; thirdly, to provide educational and cultural resources for the workers. It was natural that revolutionary ideologues attached to these institutions – as opposed, for example, to isolated theorists awaiting the outbreak of social upheaval – would attempt to conceive a mode of “proletarian revolution” that centred around these mass-organizational functions, rather than requiring the working class to sink to a certain degree of abject suffering. Consequently, certain ideological perceptions of the sociopolitical “mass” had to be introduced into their theorizations of proletarian class development.

This interpretive hypothesis can be expressed in a stronger form. The doctrines of “German orthodox Marxism” and “French revolutionary syndicalism” were both characterized by an attempt to *synthesize their ideological and institutional elements*. This argument will be fleshed out further below, but some initial points can be outlined. With the mass-organizational development of the workers’ movement, the problem of bridging between ideology and institutionality became a central concern for revolutionaries. On one hand, the inability of

proletarian-revolutionary ideology to reach a mass audience became a clear and immediate handicap in this context, for which the popularizing platform of a major institution could provide the solution. On the other, the expansion of revolutionary institutions to a mass scale presented a problem of how to maintain strategic coherence and collective spirit, for which the official adoption of a proletarian-revolutionary ideology could provide the solution. To justify this merger of ideology and institution in terms consistent with the nature of both, the theorists of German orthodox Marxism and French revolutionary syndicalism broadly conceptualized a process of sociopolitical development within which the economic formation of the proletariat as a “class” and the cultural enlightenment of the proletariat as a “mass” became merged and intertwined.

Again, this reconceptualization of “proletarian revolution” need not be viewed in terms of a dogmatic or rhetorical distortion, whereby subjective attitudes towards the revolutionary mass were imposed upon the logic of objective class development. When we consider the historical articulation of “proletarian revolution” as a concept, it can be argued that sociopolitical perceptions of the proletarian “mass” (both as the “crowd” of social modernity and as the “audience” of revolutionary literature) were no less essential a factor than the concrete emergence of the proletariat as a “class.” This argument will be elaborated in Chapter 1, which will consider German orthodox Marxism and French revolutionary syndicalism as continuations of the “Marxist” and “anarchist” traditions established during the mid-nineteenth century. Particular emphasis will be placed on the theme of *proletarian internationalism*, which can be considered as an intrinsic element of mass-organizational logic at the core of “proletarian revolution” as a political idea.

In this light, the main body of my study will sketch out the historical trajectories of German orthodox Marxism and French revolutionary syndicalism, highlighting their distinctive treatment of “proletarian revolution” in accordance with the interpretive parameters

outlined above. Both of these trajectories can be viewed in terms of a process of doctrinal *formation* and a corresponding process of *decomposition* – in other words, the rise and fall of “scientific socialism” and “direct action.” Crucially, however, these notions will be considered not as absolute and inflexible attitudes towards revolutionary action, but as fluid and evolving *textual strategies* for synthesizing the ideology and institutionality of “proletarian revolution.”

Chapter 2 will examine the formation of German orthodox Marxism. The doctrine mainly took shape in the writings of Friedrich Engels and Karl Kautsky, who codified Marxist theory into the “scientific socialism” that provided the programmatic content of the SPD. Their standpoint was crystallized in the SPD’s 1891 “Erfurt Programme.” Chapter 3 will examine the formation of French revolutionary syndicalism. The doctrine mainly took shape in the writings of Fernand Pelloutier and Émile Pouget, former anarchists who turned to the syndical movement from around 1895 as a practical platform for libertarian ideals. Their standpoint was given programmatic form by the CGT’s 1906 “Amiens Charter.”

Chapter 4 will examine the decomposition of German orthodox Marxism, which arose as the “Erfurt” standpoint was challenged through successive theoretical controversies, creating schismatic divisions amongst the SPD Marxists: firstly, the “revisionist” debate instigated by Eduard Bernstein at the turn of the century; secondly, the “mass strike” debate instigated by Rosa Luxemburg in the wake of the 1905 Russian Revolution. Chapter 5 will examine the decomposition of French revolutionary syndicalism, which can paradoxically be linked to its most emphatic theoretical manifestation – the *nouvelle école* of Georges Sorel, who idealized the syndicalist movement on political-philosophical grounds that were somewhat removed from the strict terms of “Amiens” doctrine.

The remainder of this introduction will flesh out my reinterpretation of these doctrinal developments. Firstly, I will briefly characterize the key thinkers and identify some key texts to be addressed during my analysis. Secondly, I will elaborate the rationale behind my

interpretive framing of “German orthodox Marxism” and “French revolutionary syndicalism” as textual strategies for synthesizing the ideology and institutionality of “proletarian revolution.” Finally, I will further develop the argument that a shared “mass-organizational” logic undercut the explicit antagonisms between these doctrines.

Key thinkers

Friedrich Engels was, of course, Marx’s close collaborator from around 1844 onwards, but began to position himself as a disciple of Marx’s historical materialist outlook in *Anti-Dühring* (1876-77) and *The Evolution of Socialism from Utopia to Science* (1880). These are generally viewed as the founding texts of “scientific socialism.” Following Marx’s death in 1883, Engels took on the role of literary executor and chief propagator of Marx’s theories: on one hand, preparing the second and third volumes of *Capital* (1885 and 1894) from Marx’s draft manuscripts; on the other, republishing a number of early works with the addition of exegetical prefaces and endnotes. It is often argued that this posthumous codification of Marx’s writings first gave rise to “Marxism as a single, uniform theoretical whole.”⁸ Furthermore, one of Engels’ forewords to a reissued Marx text – namely, an 1895 edition of *Class Struggles in France* (originally 1850) – was deployed by the SPD leadership as a theoretical justification for its parliamentary mode of struggle. Scholarly discussion of this late phase of Engels’ writing has generally centred on the question of whether his representation of Marxism was “true” to Marx’s theoretical intentions – for example, whether the 1895 foreword this text represented a “revisionist” turn by Engels towards democratic reformism, or if its argument was consistent with Marx’s earlier statements.⁹ My analysis will focus more on how Engels’ construction and representation of “Marxist” theory contributed to the formation of Erfurt doctrine.

⁸ Leszek Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism* [vol. 2, “The Golden Age”] (Oxford University Press, 1981), 3.

⁹ A summary of this historiography is given in: Samuel Hollander, *Friedrich Engels and Marxian Political Economy* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 17-20. Hollander himself concludes that Engels’ views supporting

Although Engels often intervened in SPD debates, he was mainly concerned with theoretical work; the drafting of the “Erfurt Programme” would fall instead to his *protégé* Karl Kautsky, founding editor of the SPD’s theoretical journal *Die neue Zeit* (established in 1883). Kautsky’s first “Marxist” work was a popularized summary of *Capital* entitled *Karl Marx’s Economic Teachings* (1886). Having composed the theoretical segment of the “Erfurt Programme,” he also produced a popular commentary to explain its underlying principles (*The Erfurt Programme*, 1892), which is frequently invoked as the canonical document of orthodox Marxist doctrine. This text seemed to present both the proletariat’s entry into parliamentary politics and the formation of the Social Democratic party as part of the necessary course of proletarian development. A characteristic representation of Kautsky – to be challenged in this study – is Dick Geary’s assessment that: “when confronted by concrete practical questions, Kautsky ... placed his faith in the workings of inexorable economic laws. ... ‘Inevitability,’ ‘necessity’ and ... ‘natural necessity’ were the words which littered Kautsky’s writings on every subject under the sun.”¹⁰ Kautsky would subsequently defend Erfurt doctrine in the face of two theoretical challenges: firstly, the “revisionist” controversy prompted by Eduard Bernstein at the turn of the century, who argued that the SPD should abandon its revolutionary aims and focus on achieving ameliorative reforms; secondly, the “mass strike” debate, after an upsurge of worker militancy across Europe – including a 1904 miners’ strike in the Ruhr – strengthened calls for extra-parliamentary radicalism.

Rosa Luxemburg’s career within the SPD was also defined by this pair of controversies. She was Kautsky’s main ally in the reaffirmation of Marxist orthodoxy against Bernstein, particularly through her polemic *Social Reform or Revolution?* (1899). However, her subsequent embrace of the “mass strike” tactic in *Mass Strike, the Party, and the Trade Unions*

parliamentary struggle in 1895 were consistent with his earlier theoretical standpoint, once the historical context of proletarian struggle is brought into consideration.

¹⁰ Dick Geary, *Karl Kautsky* (Manchester University Press, 1987), 92-93.

(1906) – even though Luxemburg viewed her argument as consistent with the spirit of Erfurt – eventually led to a split from Kautsky, precipitated by a polemical exchange of *Neue Zeit* articles in 1910. Luxemburg’s attempt in *Mass Strike* to incorporate an element of “spontaneity” into Social Democratic activity has sometimes led to comparisons with revolutionary syndicalism, although she was explicitly hostile towards this “anarchistic” viewpoint. Subsequently, Luxemburg produced a major work of economic theory, *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913), in which an analysis of imperialism was presented as the resolution to an underdeveloped aspect of Marx’s political economy. During the First World War, Luxemburg led the anti-war *Spartakusbund*, which broke from the SPD and founded the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* in 1919. This course of development suggests that Luxemburg dramatically broke away from Kautsky’s orthodox standpoint (and ultimately from German Social Democracy) due to her belief in the “mass strike.” However, my analysis will suggest a greater degree of continuity in Luxemburg’s standpoint, by arguing that her post-1905 “revolutionary” standpoint entailed a radical extension rather than a straightforward rejection of Erfurt doctrine.

Fernand Pelloutier became secretary of the *Fédération des Bourses du travail* (FBT) in 1895 (the *bourses* were co-operative labour councils that also functioned as centres of workers’ cultural activity). At this time, “syndicalism” had yet to emerge as a recognized doctrine; my analysis will examine Pelloutier’s contribution to the complex process of “emergence.” Prior to his involvement with the FBT, Pelloutier had initially advocated the general strike as a socialist tactic, particularly within Jules Guesde’s Marxian *Parti ouvrier*, but met with resistance and consequently moved into anarchist circles. This break from socialism was consecrated in a pamphlet entitled *What is the General Strike?* (1895, co-signed by Henri Girard), which presented the general strike as an autonomous and self-sufficient mode of

workers' struggle, and in texts such as "Anarchism and the labour *syndicats*" (1895) and his "Letter to anarchists" (1899), which endorsed the syndical movement as the future of anarchism. Pelloutier's *magnum opus* was his *History of the Bourses du travail* (published posthumously in 1902), which emphasized the revolutionary potential of syndicalist associations, and their concordance with the federalist principles of classical anarchism. Although Pelloutier died in 1901, just before the FBT was absorbed into the burgeoning CGT, his transposition of anarchist theory into syndicalist practice was a major influence upon the subsequent ideologues of revolutionary syndicalism.

Émile Pouget was an associate of Pelloutier and moved towards syndicalism from a similar anarchist direction, as he edited the popular anarchist newspaper *Le Père peinard* from 1889 to 1902. His work extended and combined several key themes within Pelloutier's writing, thereby giving birth to "revolutionary syndicalism" as a fully-fledged doctrine. In 1901, Pouget became vice-secretary of the CGT and co-authored the "Charte d'Amiens" with the CGT secretary Victor Griffuelhes. The principles of the "Charte" took shape in a series of earlier pamphlets by Pouget: *The Bases of Syndicalism* (1903), *The Syndicat* (1904), and *The Party of Labour* (1905). After Amiens, he produced two further, somewhat triumphalist summaries of revolutionary syndicalist doctrine: *The CGT* (1908), and *Direct Action* (1910). The central premise of all these texts was that the syndical movement (at least, in the militant form it had adopted in France) was not merely an useful instrument for the pursuit of workers' demands, but an organic expression of the workers' essential solidarity and a crystallization of their fundamental will to action, diametrically opposed to the spirit of parliamentary democracy. Aside from these texts, which all in a sense formed an explication of Amiens principles, he also co-authored (with Émile Pataud) a kind of syndicalist utopian novel, *How We Shall Make the Revolution* (1908), which envisaged the course of a successful general strike in France.

Georges Sorel was a theorist rather than a militant of revolutionary syndicalism, and arrived at revolutionary syndicalism from a Marxian rather than anarchist standpoint. In *The Socialist Future of the Syndicats* (1898), he first outlined his view that syndicalist activity was consistent with the spirit of Marx's ideas and could be used to rejuvenate contemporary socialism. This argument was elaborated and refined in a preface he provided for Pelloutier's *History*, and in his best-known work *Reflections on Violence* (1906), which introduced the notion of syndicalist general strike as a "myth" capable of galvanizing proletarian action. *The Decomposition of Marxism* (1908) situated this argument within a historical critique of Marxism and its ossification into dogmatic Social Democratic theory – a critique that is often considered as the crux of Sorel's theoretical standpoint. Due to his exclusively theoretical focus, the contribution of Sorel and his self-styled "new school" to revolutionary syndicalist activity has often been disputed; to some extent, he was merely an observer of the movement rather than a participant. However, from around 1904 to 1908, at the height of Amiens radicalism, a significant dialogue occurred between Sorelian theorists and "revolutionary" CGT leaders, particularly within Hubert Lagardelle's theoretical journal *Le Mouvement socialiste*. My study will attempt to clarify the nature of this ambiguous contribution.

Ideology and institutionalality

To comprehend the nature of "German orthodox Marxism" and "French revolutionary syndicalism," we may begin by considering the doctrinal labels themselves. The terms "orthodox Marxism" and "revolutionary syndicalism" were in use during the Second International period. However, this contemporary significance cannot provide an adequate definition of either tendency. On one hand, none of the SPD Marxists positively identified themselves as "orthodox" due to its pejorative overtones, and thus only referred to it as a label used by external observers of the movement. For example, in his 1899 riposte to Bernstein,

Kautsky noted the “sensational” publicity created by the revisionist controversy: “one of the ‘most orthodox’ Marxists writes a book, in which he solemnly incinerates what he formerly worshipped.”¹¹ Clearly, Kautsky used this term with a degree of ironic distance, and did not otherwise identify himself with an “orthodox” position. On the other, although the term “revolutionary” syndicalism was accepted by its adherents, it held a different significance for CGT leaders such as Pouget (who used it to identify a faction within the organization) and theorists such as Sorel (who linked it to the revolutionary spirit of Marx). In a 1904 article concerning debates within the CGT, Pouget was at pains to state that the labelling of “revolutionary” and “reformist” factions was purely for the purpose of “rapid comprehension,” using the “currency” of the terms rather than their “rigorous etymological sense.”¹² His concern over potential misinterpretation was perhaps due to the article being published in *Le Mouvement socialiste*, the main journal associated with the Sorelian school. Furthermore, as will be elaborated further below, even the labels “Marxist” and “syndicalist” were themselves only established during this period, and were thus not applied consistently; the former was used sparingly even by Engels, whilst the latter was almost entirely absent from Pelloutier’s writings. Consequently, I am primarily using these terms in a retrospectively-defined sense, mainly due to their prevalence within the *historiography* of the Second International period.

What, then, do these labels signify? The obvious way of defining “German orthodox Marxism” and “French revolutionary syndicalism” is to begin from the terms “Marxism” – denoting a doctrine centred upon the theories of Karl Marx – and “syndicalism” – denoting a doctrine centred upon the practices of the *syndicat* (trade union). The terms “orthodox” and “revolutionary” would then denote particular variants of these fundamental doctrinal genres. For Leszek Kołakowski, “orthodox” Marxism was characterized by the belief that Marx’s

¹¹ Karl Kautsky, *Bernstein und das Sozialdemokratische Programm* (Stuttgart: Dietz, 1899), 1.

¹² Émile Pouget, “Les débats du congrès”; *L’action directe et autres écrits syndicalistes*, ed. Miguel Chueca (Marseille: Agone, 2010), 188.

“method of historical investigation was the only system ... valid for the analysis of social phenomena”; this belief gave rise to “the stereotype known as scientific socialism – the evolutionist, determinist, and scientistic form of Marxism,” which posited the collapse of capitalist society as an objective historical necessity.¹³ For Ralph Darlington, “revolutionary syndicalism” represented “a general trend within the trade unions that placed ... emphasis on the liberating experience of spontaneous revolutionary action as the means to overthrow capitalism”; it therefore exalted “the revolutionary potential of working-class self-activity” or “direct action,” epitomized by the general strike tactic.¹⁴ Finally, “German” and “French” would indicate a further national inflection upon each doctrine – perhaps, for instance, their adaptation to the distinctive political-historical conditions of the relatively-authoritarian *Kaiserreich* and the relatively-liberal *Troisième République*.

However, a case can equally be made for constructing these definitions in the opposite direction – that is, beginning from the national appellations of “German” and “French.” Neither “German” Marxism nor “French” syndicalism can be regarded simply as one national variant amongst others (equivalent, for example, to Dutch Marxism or Italian syndicalism), because they were both acknowledged as the inaugural and world-leading examples of their respective tendencies. In part, this perception was linked to ideological conceptions (clearly not without historical justification) of Germany and France as the central axis of revolutionary history. Of greater importance, however, was the fact that both tendencies were associated with pre-eminent institutions within the European workers’ movement. The “model” status of the electorally-successful SPD for other socialist parties of the period is well-documented,¹⁵ and was explicitly recognized by its Marxist theoreticians – thus, in 1895, Engels stated that

¹³ Kołakowski, *Main Currents* [vol. 2], 31-32.

¹⁴ Ralph Darlington, *Radical Unionism: The rise and fall of revolutionary syndicalism* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2008), 19.

¹⁵ See: Georges Haupt, “Model party: The role and influence of German social democracy in South-East Europe”; *Aspects of International Socialism* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), 48-80.

“German Social Democracy has ... a special task”: to demonstrate the use of “universal suffrage” as a revolutionary “weapon” to “its comrades of all nations.”¹⁶ The militancy of the CGT was acknowledged as a model by leading syndicalists in other nations (most notably Italy),¹⁷ and was certainly conceived as an international exemplar by its own leaders – thus, in 1907, CGT secretary Victor Griffuelhes posed the question of “why our action has ... forced the attention of our foreign comrades,” and concluded that the “originality of French syndicalism” lay in its emphasis on “spontaneous and creative action.”¹⁸

This international pre-eminence might still be viewed as a contingent rather than essential aspect of each doctrine, were it not for the fact that (as already mentioned) it was within these contexts that the very concepts of “Marxism” and “syndicalism” originated – or, more precisely, that they first acquired the sense of legitimate doctrinal tendencies. As Georges Haupt notes, “it was German social democracy that gave the terms ‘Marxist’ and ‘Marxism’ ... a new meaning,” changing them from “pejorative labels” to “positive concepts.”¹⁹ Previously used by anarchists to denigrate a supposed sect in thrall to the personality of Marx, its adoption by the SPD – and, in particular, by Kautsky – redefined the term “Marxism” as both a systematic “vision of the world” (dialectical-historical materialism) and “a programme of action” aligned to the workers’ movement.²⁰ In this light, “German orthodox Marxism” denotes not only a particular current of Marxist thought, but also the historical setting in which “Marxism” was first conceived as a coherent revolutionary doctrine. Similarly, the label of “syndicalism” was primarily a negative epithet until around 1900, used by certain socialists to criticize those with too narrow a focus upon trade-unionist activity; most “syndicalists” at this

¹⁶ Friedrich Engels, “Einleitung [zu Karl Marx’ *Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich 1848 bis 1850* (1895)]”; Marx/ Engels, *Werke* 22 (Berlin: Dietz, 1963), 518-24.

¹⁷ Arturo Labriola, “Le syndicalisme et le socialisme en Italie”; Hubert Lagardelle (ed.), *Syndicalisme et socialisme* (Paris: Rivière, 1908), 19.

¹⁸ Victor Griffuelhes, “Les caractères du syndicalisme français”; *ibid.*, 55-58.

¹⁹ Georges Haupt, “From Marx and Marxism”; *Aspects*, 7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

time still identified themselves primarily as socialists or anarchists.²¹ With the growing force of the CGT, its militants subsequently reclaimed the term, as in Pouget's *Bases*: "The word 'syndicalism' has recently acquired a deeper signification ... expressing a 'moment' of worker consciousness. ... For the 'syndicalist,' the *syndicat* is the grouping *par excellence* ... [for] the work of capitalist expropriation [and] social reorganization."²² In this light, "French revolutionary syndicalism" denotes not only a particular trend within the trade-unionist movement, but also the historical setting in which "syndicalism" was first asserted as an autonomous revolutionary doctrine.

In summary, "German orthodox Marxism" and "French revolutionary syndicalism" were not simply historical variants of "Marxism" and "syndicalism" – that is, adaptations of these fundamental ideological standpoints to specific "German" and "French" circumstances. They also denote the bodies of "German" Social Democratic and "French" trade-unionist writing, centred around the SPD and CGT, within which the doctrinal labels of "Marxism" and "syndicalism" were conceived and proclaimed for the first time. In this light, it is possible to distinguish two ideological aspects at work within each of the tendencies: on one hand, a *primary doctrine* – a set of beliefs that formed a coherent vision of revolutionary struggle, rooted in the perceived "truth" of Marxist theory or syndicalist practice; on the other, a kind of supplementary *metadoctrine* – a set of principles that legitimized "Marxism" and "syndicalism" as new doctrinal formations, rooted in the historical exemplarity of German Social Democracy and French trade unionism during the Second International period. These layers corresponded to distinct political operations: the "primary doctrine" represented an effort to provide the activities of the SPD and CGT with an authoritative theoretical grounding – using the

²¹ In a speech delivered in 1900, Paul Delesalle – subsequently one of the leading revolutionary syndicalist militants – spoke of "syndicalists (as certain people so disdainfully call them)"; at this point, Delesalle still labelled himself as an "anarchist" operating within the "syndical" movement (Delesalle, *L'action syndicale et les anarchistes* (Paris: Temps nouveaux, 1901), 7).

²² Émile Pouget, "Les bases du syndicalisme"; *L'action directe*, 53-54.

ideologies to legitimate the institutions – whilst the “metadoctrine” sought rather to translate distinctive national-institutional modes of struggle into a generally-applicable theoretical form – using the institutions to ground the ideologies.

Accordingly, neither ideology nor institutionality should take precedence in the characterization of the doctrines under analysis; they are perhaps best understood as complex textual structures upon which these factors had an equal and reciprocal influence. In this regard, two key texts can be said to have encapsulated both doctrines: the SPD’s 1891 “Erfurt Programme,” whose main architect was Kautsky,²³ and the CGT’s 1906 “Amiens Charter,” whose main architect was Pouget.²⁴ These programmatic statements (both named after the venue cities of the conferences at which they were ratified) are already generally regarded as the core statements of each doctrine’s revolutionary vision – that is, of their “primary doctrines.” The “Erfurt Programme” outlined how the “economic development of bourgeois society leads with nature-necessity” to increased proletarianization and intensifying economic crises (in accordance with Marxist theory), whose ultimate resolution could only arrive through the socialization of the “means of production” by the workers, having seized “possession of political power”; the “task of the Social Democratic party” was one of theoretical guidance: “to shape the struggle of the working class into a conscious and unified form, and to point it towards its nature-necessary goal.”²⁵ The “Amiens Charter” claimed that the “day-to-day revendicatory work” of the *syndicats* would also eventually “prepare the integral emancipation” of the workers, building a basis for “social reorganization,” with the “general strike” as its

²³ This attribution to Kautsky refers to the theoretical segment of the “Erfurt Programme,” to which a set of immediate demands (mainly the work of Eduard Bernstein) was attached; it should also be noted that Kautsky’s text was a heavily-edited version of an earlier draft by a party committee, and not all of his suggested alterations were retained in the final version.

²⁴ This attribution to Pouget is made despite the fact that it was CGT secretary Victor Griffuelhes who submitted the document to the CGT’s Amiens Congress, having by all accounts participated in its composition; however, Pouget’s 1905 pamphlet *La parti du Travail* already contained a formulation of the syndicalist standpoint very close to that of the “Charter,” which suggests his preponderant influence upon the text.

²⁵ [SPD, “Erfurter Programm”]; *Protokoll über die Verhandlung des Parteitags der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands* (Berlin: Vorwärts, 1891), 3-4.

“means of action”; to achieve this, it was essential for syndicalist struggle to be waged “directly against the employers,” strictly “on economic terrain,” and “outside any political school.”²⁶ In short, these texts provided succinct representations of Marxist “scientific socialism” and syndicalist “direct action.”

What must now be added to the picture is the “metadoctrinal” aspect of both texts – the way in which their institutional nature conditioned their ideological significance, rather than the other way round. Here one can first of all emphasize the fact that these eminently institutional texts effectively functioned as the manifestos of German orthodox Marxism and French revolutionary syndicalism, ahead of other “pure” ideological texts. Furthermore, the nature of the institution was, in both cases, integrated into the doctrinal content of the text. On one hand, it is notable that the logic of social development in the “Erfurt Programme” included the political role of the SPD within its theoretical scope – in contrast to its predecessor, the 1875 “Gotha Programme,” in which the name of the party only appeared in the “practical” section of the text (its immediate demands).²⁷ On the other, the “Amiens Charter” began by citing an article of the CGT’s constitution – “The CGT groups, outside any political school, all workers conscious of the struggle to be waged for the disappearance of ... the employers” – and couched all of its subsequent assertions as a theoretical elaboration of this statute.²⁸ In short, neither text simply presented the “principles” or “demands” of their respective institutions; the nature of the institution voicing those principles was also afforded a certain significance.

This fact reflected the metadoctrinal considerations that shaped the composition of both texts. An 1890 article by Kautsky, which presented his draft version of the programme, made

²⁶ [CGT, “Charte d’Amiens”]; *XV^e Congrès national corporatif et Conférence des Bourses du travail* (Amiens: Progrès de la Somme), 170-71.

²⁷ A comparison between these programmes, which it will not be possible to develop here, shows that their structure of argument was very similar, and that each formed the split between “theoretical” and “practical” sections at a different point in the same basic sequence – in other words, the “Erfurt” text effectively shifted its paragraphs regarding the task and nature of the party from the beginning of the “practical” section to the end of the “theoretical” section.

²⁸ [CGT, “Charte d’Amiens.”]

it clear that the text's significance would lay not only in its principled exposition of "scientific socialism," but also in its public demonstration of the growing "clarity and unity within our party" due to its adoption of the "scientific" mode of thought; the SPD was thus the vanguard of scientific socialism, thanks in part to the "favourable conditions ... for Germany to possess a scientific socialist literature."²⁹ In a 1905 pamphlet, Pouget had already invoked the same CGT statute as encapsulating the "essence of syndicalist doctrine," which was crucial for his representation of syndicalism as an "organic" doctrine emanating directly from the workers' struggle rather than from artificial "philosophical" or "political" abstractions; the CGT constitution was not a "philosophical" document but an "expression of the moment ... subject to modification like any living organism."³⁰ The institutional nature of the SPD and the CGT thus fundamentally conditioned the representation of "Marxist" and "syndicalist" doctrine in the Erfurt and Amiens texts.

Turning to the overall canons of German orthodox Marxism and French revolutionary syndicalism, the preceding analysis would suggest that their political-historical trajectories are best understood in terms of *evolving textual strategies* that sought to synthesize their "ideological" and "institutional" aspects into a coherent doctrinal standpoint. In this regard, the Erfurt and Amiens statements were the main points of crystallization, each encapsulating a textual-political dynamic that manifested in a more diffuse and unstable fashion within precedent and subsequent writings. The development of both doctrines can thus be narrated in terms of the *formation* and subsequent *decomposition* of the textual strategies consecrated at Erfurt and Amiens.

²⁹ [Karl Kautsky,] "Der Entwurf des neuen Parteiprogramms [1/4]"; *Die neue Zeit* [NZ] 9.ii (1891), 724.

³⁰ Émile Pouget, "Le parti du Travail"; *L'action directe*, 147.

The grounds of antithesis

The antithesis between orthodox Marxism and revolutionary syndicalism may be considered in institutional or ideological terms. It can be framed as the doctrinal crystallization of a strategic institutional choice confronted by revolutionaries in the late nineteenth-century, as Ina Hermes summarizes in her study of national variations in the relationship between trade unions and the socialist Second International:

Towards the end of the 19th century, virtually all socialist workers' organizations in different nations endeavoured towards a common action against international capitalism. The question was only on what basis such a collective labour should be organized – on a trade unionist basis, as demanded above all by ... the French syndicalists, or on a parliamentary-political basis, as demanded above all by the German socialists.³¹

From this perspective, the root of the Marxist-syndicalist antithesis was the co-existence of two seemingly viable organizational paths to revolution, neither of which had yet established absolute dominance within the European workers' movement. Orthodox Marxism and revolutionary syndicalism were radically opposed to each other because they were the leading doctrinal advocates of these competing, mutually-exclusive possibilities.

Other accounts have linked the Marxist-syndicalist antithesis to a deeper-rooted *ideological* disagreement over the essential nature of revolutionary worker activity. This is particularly the case when “syndicalism” is viewed as an oppositional reaction to the growing

³¹ Ina Hermes, *Gegen Imperialismus und Krieg: Gewerkschaften und II. Internationale* (Köln: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1979), 96.

dominance of the parliamentary-socialist model. For Ralph Darlington, the emergence of revolutionary syndicalism, with its radical “disassociation” from “all labour and socialist parties,”³² was rooted in the recognition of two “contradictory principles: *indirect* action – involving the principle of democracy and its successor parliamentary politics; and *direct* action – which eliminated all intermediaries existing between the worker and his objective.”³³ Opposition between the “activist *élan*” of “direct action” and the “parliamentary process” of “electoral socialism” also figures in Geoff Eley’s account of a general pre-war “radicalization” within the European workers’ movement – an “extraparliamentary resurgence” inspired by the 1905 Russian Revolution.³⁴ Although it seems closely tied to the strategic opposition between party and trade union, the ideological antithesis between “activist” and “electoral” attitudes can function as an independent explanatory figure: “[s]yndicalist rhetoric resonated with the revolutionary temper of a new Marxist Left [operating within socialist parties] ... who disputed the Second International’s ... orthodoxies.”³⁵

Without questioning the historiographical validity of these “antithetical” readings, I will now attempt to illuminate an area of inquiry that they effectively place out of focus. Both of these aspects of doctrinal antithesis each imply a certain *preliminary common ground* between orthodox Marxism and revolutionary syndicalism. Without responding to some form of shared problematic, the differences between the two doctrines could not have taken on political significance as a conflictual opposition; they would simply have constituted two heterogeneous phenomena. In other words, whilst their explicitly-stated principles were antagonistic, this very fact required them to participate in a common field of articulation and

³² Darlington, *Radical Unionism*, 25.

³³ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁴ Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The history of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 97-98.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

legitimization. I will ultimately suggest that this “common field” should be linked to the mass-organizational development of the workers’ movement.

In her description of the “strategic” antithesis between pre-war “German socialists” and “French syndicalists,” Hermes recognizes that the choice between parliamentary socialism and pure trade-unionism attained such decisive significance precisely because of an underlying consensus over the fundamental parameters of the revolutionary project. “Virtually all” elements of the European workers’ movement were dedicated to “common action against international capitalism,” and sought to establish a strong organizational “basis” for this “collective labour.” Although the terms of this consensus may seem extremely broad, it can be considered how this overriding emphasis upon co-ordinated anti-capitalist activity was the consequence of certain alternatives falling into discredit. On one hand, nineteenth-century philanthropic reforms had failed to substantively improve the condition of the workers; it was recognized that philanthropy could never resolve the structural flaws of capitalism that stood at the root of social misery. On the other, the need for co-ordinated action was linked to the increased scale and technological advancement of state-military forces. Jeremy Jennings has noted how Engels and Pelloutier shared this view:³⁶ “rebellion in the old style, the street-struggle with barricades ... [is] significantly antiquated”;³⁷ “[with] insurrection ... concentrated in a restricted space ... the government today holds many more advantages.”³⁸ Due to these considerations, German Marxism and French syndicalism both pursued a middle course between the extremes of *social reform* and *revolutionary insurrection*.

For the orthodox Marxists, the true path of German Social Democracy bisected reformist socialism and insurrectionist anarchism. In 1891, Kautsky distinguished the

³⁶ Jeremy Jennings, “Syndicalism and the French Revolution”; *Journal of Contemporary History* 26.1 (January 1991), 73.

³⁷ Engels, “Einleitung (1895)”; 519.

³⁸ Fernand Pelloutier & Henri Girard, “Qu’est-ce que la grève générale? [1895]”; [“Textes choisis de Fernand Pelloutier,”] *Fernand Pelloutier et les origines du syndicalisme d’action directe [FP]*, Jacques Julliard (Paris: Seuil, 1971), 326.

“scientific” viewpoint of the newly-drafted “Erfurt Programme” from two existing socialist tendencies: “the state-socialists and the terroristic anarchists.” Whilst the former merely sought to “help the state along” to socialism, and thus made a “cult of universal suffrage” and “direct legislation by the people,” the latter believed that the “indifferent, stupid mass” could only be brought to socialism by “insurrection” and “the revolutionary dictatorship of wise, far-seeing men.”³⁹ In *Social Reform*, Luxemburg adapted this argumentation in response to the “revisionist” theory of Bernstein. Luxemburg characterized Bernstein’s standpoint as a theoretical form of bourgeois “opportunism,” and concluded that the “Social Democratic movement” had to navigate a “path of development [*Entwicklungsgang*] between [two] cliffs: between the abandonment of [its] mass-character and the abandonment of its end-goals; between relapsing into a sect and collapsing into a bourgeois reform-movement; between anarchism and opportunism.”⁴⁰

Revolutionary syndicalism also positioned itself between reformism and insurrectionism. In 1892, Pelloutier’s initial arguments in favour of the “general strike” proposed it as an alternative to universal suffrage and “useless” socialist “appeals to the public authorities” on one hand, and to the counter-productive tactic of “insurrection” and the preparation for “bloody revolutions” on the other.⁴¹ He would later develop this argument by differentiating the syndical movement as a whole from two forms of socialist dogmatism: “the parliamentary doctrinaires,” for whom “all social transformation is subordinate to the conquest of political power” and “the revolutionary doctrinaires,” for whom “no socialist enterprise is possible prior to the redemptive cataclysm.”⁴² Subsequently, the theorists of Sorel’s “new school” incorporated this structure into their conception of revolutionary syndicalism as the

³⁹ Kautsky, “Entwurf [1/4]”; 726-27.

⁴⁰ Rosa Luxemburg, “Sozialreform oder Revolution?”; *Gesammelte Werke* [Band 1.i, “1893 bis 1905”] (Berlin: Dietz, 1979), 440.

⁴¹ Fernand Pelloutier, “Résolution votée le 4 septembre 1892 au congrès socialiste régional de Tours sur proposition de Fernand Pelloutier”; *FP*, 306.

⁴² Pelloutier, *Histoire*, 247-48.

rejuvenation of a decadent socialist movement. For Hubert Lagardelle, syndicalism could achieve that “passage ... to a free society” that the “two extreme forms of traditional socialism: parliamentary socialism and anarchist socialism” were “incapable of realizing.”⁴³ Edouard Berth’s 1908 booklet *The New Aspects of Socialism* was entirely devoted to this argument, representing the “novelty of revolutionary syndicalism” in contradistinction to the “old forms of worker revolt”: namely, “Guesdism [the standpoint of Jules Guesde’s *Parti ouvrier*],” which “incarnates the political socialism ... of the ‘Party,’” and “anarchism,” which “incarnates the ‘individualist socialism ... of the sect.’”⁴⁴

For the orthodox Marxists, revolutionary syndicalism was an example of anarchistic insurrectionism. Even Rosa Luxemburg’s radical argument for the “mass strike” began by summarily dismissing the view of “the French ... ‘syndicalists’,” for whom “the trade-unionist struggle represents the only ‘direct action of the masses’ and thus the only form of revolutionary struggle”; this viewpoint belonged to the obsolete, utopian, “wholly abstract and unhistorical conception” of anarchism.⁴⁵ For the revolutionary syndicalists, the “authoritarian organization” of German Social Democracy epitomized the limitations of reformist parliamentary socialism – which, in the words of Hubert Lagardelle, “systematically tends to break the free *élan* of individuality and to lock it into rigid cadres It is why we work towards the ruin of the antiquated dictatorship of German Social Democracy.”⁴⁶ Thus, in a paradoxical way, the explicit antagonism between these doctrines can be linked to an underlying commonality – the pursuit of a path between social reformism and revolutionary insurrectionism, synthesizing the institutionality of the former and the ideology of the latter.

⁴³ Hubert Lagardelle, “Avant-propos”; Lagardelle (ed.), *Syndicalisme et socialisme*, 4-5.

⁴⁴ Edouard Berth, *Les nouveaux aspects du socialisme* (Paris: Rivière, 1908), 3.

⁴⁵ Rosa Luxemburg, “Massenstreik, Partei und Gewerkschaften [1906]”; *Gesammelte Werke* [Band 2, “1906 bis Juni 1911”] (Berlin: Dietz, 1974), 95.

⁴⁶ Hubert Lagardelle, “Avant-propos”; *Syndicalisme et socialisme*, 7.

The historical grounds of the “ideological” antithesis between “direct” and “indirect” action can be excavated in a similar fashion. As previously stated, it is when revolutionary syndicalism is viewed as an impulse of resistance against the growing dominance of parliamentary socialism that the attitudinal contrast between “direct” initiative and “indirect” organization takes on particular significance. This suggests a possible path of inquiry. The pre-war dominance of “socialist constitutionalism” was arguably a consequence of the “dramatic liberalizations of 1867-71” across several European states, “which allowed many labour movements their first legal agitation on a larger-than-local scale.”⁴⁷ Orthodox Marxism and revolutionary syndicalism were divided over whether this democratic opening represented the opportunity for a peaceful, constitutional path to revolution, or an illusory dead-end and bourgeois snare that would paralyze the revolutionary movement.

However, it can be noted that neither doctrine responded *unambiguously* to the liberalization of European state politics. We can refer here to the notion of “negative integration,” a model of “democratization” used by Günther Roth in his seminal study of the pre-war SPD, but which can apply equally to the French context: “a political system permits a hostile mass movement to exist legally, but prevents it from gaining access to the centres of power.”⁴⁸ On this basis, both doctrines were implicated in a “dialectic of integration and exclusion” in relation to the dominant political culture.⁴⁹ On one hand, whilst orthodox Marxism saw an opportunity to work within the parliamentary system, it initially emerged in specific opposition to “state-socialist” tendencies within German Social Democracy; the Marxists insisted on the continued need for a revolutionary transformation of the state, despite Otto von Bismarck’s programme of welfare reforms during the 1880s. On the other, whilst revolutionary syndicalism explicitly rejected any integration into the bourgeois-political sphere,

⁴⁷ Eley, *Forging Democracy*, 62.

⁴⁸ Günther Roth, *The Social Democrats in Imperial Germany: A study in working-class isolation and national integration* (New Jersey: Bedminster, 1963), 8.

⁴⁹ Eley, *Forging Democracy*, 69.

it was equally beholden to constitutional “liberalization” at an organizational level – specifically, the legalization of professional *syndicats* in 1884 by the liberal-republican minister Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau.

The impact of nineteenth-century “liberalization” upon the workers’ movement was not simply to open the door for parliamentary-democratic forms of activity. Its broader effect was to place the nation-state at the centre of revolutionary activity, and to push *localist* approaches to the margins of the movement. Workers’ struggle could not restrict itself to isolated efforts at a local level, because the meaning of its struggle was now determined at a national-constitutional level. For Kautsky, the futility of insurrectionary struggle was not only due to the military strength of the state, but also because “political and economic evolution in all modern states has ... tak[en] away the monopoly of political life ... from capital cities, and shap[ed] political life into a veritable national form, extending across the whole nation. Thus is any revolutionary movement condemned to failure, [if it] does not include the domain of the whole nation within its scope.”⁵⁰ An emphasis on national political life also distinguished French syndicalism from earlier strands of anarchism and trade-unionism – in its rejection of localized “partial strikes” unless these could be linked to the construction of an ultimate “general strike”;⁵¹ and in the way that the national *Confédération*, initially established as an mere administrative adjunct to local *syndicats*, became conceived the centre of gravity for syndicalist politics. When the revolutionary syndicalists conceived the CGT as “an autonomous organization, independent of all democratic parties,” it implied that it was operating as an “autonomous” force on the same national stage as the political parties.⁵²

In this light, we can identify *worker representation on a national-democratic scale* as a shared problematic confronted by both orthodox Marxism and revolutionary syndicalism.

⁵⁰ Kautsky, “Entwurf [1/4]”; 730.

⁵¹ Jennings, *Syndicalism in France*, 16.

⁵² Émile Pouget, *La Confédération générale du Travail* (Paris: Rivière, 1908), 3.

The Marxist and syndicalist responses to the political-historical conditions of revolutionary mass organization entailed neither an outright embrace nor an outright rejection of the “democratic opening” to workers’ politics, but a complex approach to the same ambiguous situation of *incomplete democratization*. They proposed neither unconditional participation in democracy nor a total abandonment of the field – although this was perhaps how they perceived each other’s standpoints. For German orthodox Marxism, participation in parliamentary democracy was predicated on the notion that proletarian participation would transform the very nature of democracy: “When the proletariat as a self-conscious class ... participates in parliament, parliamentarism thereby begins to transform from its former nature. It ceases to be a pure means of rule for the bourgeoisie.”⁵³ In French revolutionary syndicalism, whilst its critique of bourgeois “democratism” was absolute, it should not be overlooked that the syndicalist confederation was presented as a “direct” form of popular representation operating on the same national-political stage.⁵⁴ Again, the antithesis between “direct” and “indirect” action was not a point of originary divergence, but a complex differentiation that took shape within a common framework of ideological development.

In summary, by elucidating the preliminary historical grounds within which the “antitheses” between German orthodox Marxism and French revolutionary syndicalism were articulated, I have identified two broad points of primordial commonality at the level of doctrinal content: firstly, the perceived antiquation of earlier forms of revolutionary activity, reformism and insurrectionism; secondly, the problematic of worker representation on a national-democratic scale, prompted by the political ambivalences of incomplete democratization. These points give a clear indication of how the “mass-organizational”

⁵³ Karl Kautsky, *Das Erfurter Programm, in seinem grundsätzlichen Teil erläutert* (Stuttgart: Dietz, 1899), 225.

⁵⁴ Pierre Rosanvallon has argued that the revolutionary syndicalist critique of bourgeois “democratism” was not straightforwardly anti-democratic but expressed “the aspiration for a *substantialist democracy*” as opposed to the abstract representationality of the established political system (Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le peuple introuvable: Histoire de la représentation démocratique en France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), 221-32).

conditions of revolutionary doctrine during the Second International period constituted a preliminary common ground between these doctrines, which underlay the articulation of their antithetical statements.

I

The institutionalization of Marxism and anarchism

Surveying the landscape of “socialist thought” during the Second International period, GDH Cole notes that the two major doctrinal tendencies of the period – in his terms, “Social Democracy” and “Revolutionary Syndicalism” – were direct descendents of the “Marxist” and “anarchist” factions that had previously polarized the International Workingmen’s Association:

[T]he struggle between Marxism and Anarchism ... had not ended in 1889; but ... both combatants had undergone a considerable transformation. Marxism had been reshaped throughout Western Europe as Social Democracy and had become organized in a series of national parties which were ... active in the electoral field Anarchism meanwhile was being deeply affected by the growth of Trade Unionism, and was being reincarnated in part as ... Revolutionary Syndicalism ... , on the basis of an exaltation of the rôle of Direct Action, with the general strike as a weapon, as against Parliamentary action.⁵⁵

This summary suggests that German orthodox Marxism and French revolutionary syndicalism, whose doctrinal antagonism defined the ideological field of the Second International era, can be seen as *institutionalized* versions of the main ideological “combatants” within the First

⁵⁵ GDH Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought* [vol. 3, “The Second International, 1889-1914”] (London: MacMillan, 1963), xi.

International. On one hand, “Marxism” became attached to the specific organizational form of the Social Democratic “party,” of which the world-leading example was the SPD; on the other, “anarchism” became attached to the *syndicat* (trade union), most successfully and visibly in the context of the CGT. Consequently, a philosophical antagonism that initially arose within the First International over issues such as the necessity of “political action” and the nature of the “State” – and which was coloured by personal rivalries, such as between Karl Marx and the Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin – was recast, in the Second International period, into the programmatic opposition between the “parliamentary action” of orthodox Marxism and the “direct action” of revolutionary syndicalism.

This schema might suggest that German orthodox Marxism and French revolutionary syndicalism emerged when the pure “Marxist” and “anarchist” theories of “proletarian revolution” became overlain by practical assumptions and objectives linked to the mass-organizational development of the workers’ movement. Existing interpretations of both tendencies have tended to view the formative interaction between ideology and institution in these terms. Lars T Lih argues that the orthodox Marxist “merger formula,” through which “scientific socialism” was represented as the historic union of socialism and the proletariat, was primarily rooted not in theory but in the “emotional charge of ... a *mission*” – a “proselytising fervour” and “flowery rhetoric” that accentuated the “dramatic plot” of Marx and Engels’ *Communist Manifesto* over its ideological principles.⁵⁶ This “emotional charge” emanated from the institutional development of German Social Democracy rather than from within “Marxism” as such; for Lih, its key points of reference were the quasi-evangelical “emotional appeal” of the popular socialist Ferdinand Lassalle, who had been the first to establish a German workers’ party in 1863; and the institutional mythology of the SPD, whose “strength and prestige” in both organizational and electoral terms made it “a source of

⁵⁶ Lars T Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered: What Is To Be Done? In context* (Amsterdam: BRILL, 2006), 41-43.

confidence ... for socialists the world around.”⁵⁷ On the side of revolutionary syndicalism, the existing historiography has tended to stress the “originality” of syndicalist doctrine. “Direct action” was coloured by the mutualist, federalist, and anti-authoritarian values of the anarchist militants who infiltrated the syndical movement, but its practical emphasis upon trade unionist activity and the general strike represented a rupture more than a continuation of anarchism. This emphasis on the originality of syndicalism is partly a response to early accounts of revolutionary syndicalism, which peremptorily characterized the CGT leaders as followers of Proudhon; for Jacques Julliard, this notion of “ideological filiation” was unsustainable: “the divergences are too significant, the syndicalists ... too much scholars of the real [in other words, focused on practical matters] to be the disciples of ideologues.”⁵⁸ The doctrine of the “Amiens Charter” was “close to the spirit of traditional anarchism,” but distinguished from this tradition “in the way that it envisaged the revolution” as an “active practice.”⁵⁹

This chapter will approach the “institutionalization” of Marxism and anarchism from a different angle. I will attempt to show that these classical doctrinal traditions already harboured an intrinsic element of “mass-organizational” logic. On this basis, it can be argued that German orthodox Marxism and French revolutionary syndicalism did not simply impose an extrinsic institutional mission or mythology upon the “pure” ideologies of their doctrinal predecessors. To a large extent, their institutionalizations of “proletarian revolution” arose through the elaboration, transposition, or concretization of elements already present within each ideological tradition. By this, I do not simply refer to the fact that Marx’s writings gave a degree of equivocal support to parliamentary-democratic modes of revolutionary struggle, and that anarchists such as Bakunin viewed workers’ co-operatives and the general strike in a positive light. The point is rather that their fundamental conceptions of “proletarian revolution” already

⁵⁷ Ibid., 61-62.

⁵⁸ Julliard, *Fernand Pelloutier*, 210.

⁵⁹ Maitron, *Mouvement anarchiste* [vol. 1], 330.

contained the conceptual seeds of the *textual syntheses between ideology and institutionality* that subsequently germinated into Marxist “scientific socialism” and syndicalist “direct action.” This argument will be developed in two stages. Firstly, I will examine how orthodox Marxism and revolutionary syndicalism extended upon the logic of *revolutionary literature* outlined within foundational texts of Marxist and anarchist doctrine: Marx and Engels’ *Communist Manifesto* (1848), and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s *On the Political Capacity of the Working Classes* (1865). Secondly, I will examine how orthodox Marxism and revolutionary syndicalism were influenced by the logic of *proletarian internationalism* that underlay Marx and Bakunin’s attitudes within the International Workingmen’s Association. This will explain how Marx’s “Provisional Rules” (1864) for the First International became a key point of reference for both Marxists and syndicalists during the Second International period.

Revolutionary literatures: Marx/Proudhon

The category of “revolutionary thought” is not a stable and timeless genre, but one whose fundamental parameters are subject to historical transformation. Reinhart Koselleck has characterized the concept of “revolution” as “a linguistic product of our modernity.”⁶⁰ The term was originally a “naturalistic metaphor” that framed political changes as part of an eternal “circular course” in history, and was closely linked to the notion of “civil war” as an ephemeral conflict between different strata of a fixed social order.⁶¹ It was only with the advent of political, social, and philosophical “modernity” – gestating in eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought and unleashed dramatically by the 1789 French Revolution – that “revolution” took on the sense of an absolute break from the “senseless circling” of the past, a transformation that “open[s] up a new vista” in the course of “human history.”⁶² “Modernity” converted the quasi-

⁶⁰ Reinhart Koselleck, “Historical Criteria of the Modern Concept of Revolution”; *Futures Past: On the semantics of historical time* (Columbia University Press, 2004), 44.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 48-49.

cosmological concept of “revolution” into a perfectible category of conscious human activity: “a regulative principle of knowledge and the actions of all those drawn into revolution.”⁶³ This shift also entailed that “political revolution” was no longer conceived as a temporary disruption within an eternal social order, but rather as a step towards the ultimate “social revolution”: “the idea that the objective of a political revolution should be the social emancipation of all men, transforming the social structure.”⁶⁴

The revolutionary moment of 1789 thus inaugurated the “modern concept of revolution.” Koselleck then identifies two subsequent developments, through which elements of the pre-modern sense of “revolution” reasserted themselves within its modern conceptual framework. Firstly, in the wake of the failed 1848 German Revolution, Karl Marx reintroduced the “older sense of revolution as repetition” into his analysis of 1848 as a “caricature of the great French Revolution”; however, he then proposed “to complete this repetition in consciousness,” instigating a revolutionary “learning process” whose ultimate result would be a “social revolution” that would “write off the past and create its substance out of the future.”⁶⁵ The revolutionary force of Enlightenment had proven insufficient to wholly eradicate social suffering; its bourgeois values had to be radicalized through proletarian consciousness. As the ultimate social revolution seemingly could not issue directly and immediately from Enlightened thought, the revolutionary act had to be repeated until the development of proletarian consciousness had attained a sufficient level to succeed and emancipate mankind. Secondly, Koselleck identified “Leninism,” the doctrine of the 1917 Russian Revolution, as the prime example of how “the concept of revolution ... reassumed the logic of civil war”; in Bolshevik doctrine, “revolution” took on the qualities of an “absolute” struggle against a “permanent” enemy (namely, the forces of “reaction” or “counterrevolution,” whose ubiquity

⁶³ Ibid., 50.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 52.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 53-54. Here Koselleck refers to Marx’s *Class Struggles in France* (1851) and *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (1852).

took the place of the fixed social strata that had grounded the older logic of “civil war”), waged by the “modern professional revolutionary” (a figure “typified by Lenin”) for whom “any means available” is “legitimate” in the final reckoning.⁶⁶ Thus, if the modern concept of “revolution” originated as a direct expression of Enlightenment optimism, the subsequent course of revolutionary history gradually revived the pre-modern semantic resources of the term, transforming “revolution” back into a naturalistic, eternal, and universal phenomenon: the “global and infinite” struggle of revolutionary “consciousness” against “domination in general.”⁶⁷ Modern “revolution” circled back to its pre-Enlightenment metaphoricity; thus, for Koselleck, the conceptual history of “revolution” underwent its own revolution (in the pre-modern sense of the term).

We can now consider how the concept of “proletarian revolution” fits into this broad framework. Koselleck’s analysis only briefly refers to “the development of industrial labo[u]r” as a factor that strengthened post-1789 demands for “political revolution” to lead on to an ultimate “social revolution.”⁶⁸ However, it is clear from his references to Marx and Lenin that the idea of “proletarian revolution” was central to the conceptual developments that he describes. Broadly speaking, the revolutionary thought of 1789 was oriented around the task of elevating the “people” (the popular force behind the Revolution) into “citizens” (individuals whose natural rights and liberties were to be guaranteed by the constitutional-democratic nation); the urban working class had only a marginal presence in French Revolutionary discourse. The European uprisings of 1848 were to a large extent predicated upon the same ideological grounds, but also inaugurated a new line of revolutionary thought through Marx and Engels’ *Communist Manifesto*. Marx and Engels recognized the emergence of the industrial-capitalist working class as a stratum of society for whom democratic “citizenship”

⁶⁶ Ibid., 54-56.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 56.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 52.

had proved to be an insufficient defence against capitalist exploitation. Conscious of the limits of the 1789 Revolution, the proletariat would not accept a limited bourgeois revolution, but would seek to complete and conclude the emancipation of society by eradicating capitalist private property. The *Manifesto* predicted that an imminent “bourgeois revolution in Germany” (that is, Germany’s replication of the French Revolution) would be “the immediate prelude to a proletarian revolution.”⁶⁹ However, when this radicalization of the 1848 revolution did not transpire – as even the “bourgeois” demands of the *Märzrevolution* were ultimately pushed back by the forces of reaction – the “proletarian revolution” was reassessed as a long-term political goal, which would require the formation of proletarian class-consciousness amongst the workers. Such a process would necessitate the establishment of revolutionary institutions and the participation of revolutionary intellectuals – in short, what Koselleck describes as “modern professional revolutionary” activity. This treatment of “proletarian revolution” reached its apotheosis in the vanguardist Bolshevik philosophy of the 1917 Revolution.

In short, the interests of the “proletariat” represented the aspect of “social revolution” that the failings of 1789 had shown to lie beyond the immediate application of Enlightenment thought. For Koselleck, the notion of “proletarian revolution” reintroduced the quasi-cosmological forms of pre-Enlightenment thought into the “modern” concept of revolution, in an attempt to accelerate and complete the unfinished project of sociopolitical Enlightenment. However, I would argue that the concept can be read in another way; by reintroducing an element of pre-modern transcendentality, the idea of “proletarian revolution” may alternatively be viewed as a *rigorous application of Enlightenment thought to its own sociopolitical grounds*. Insofar as the intellectual properties and privileges of Enlightenment were distributed in an unequal or unjust manner, or Enlightenment ideals could themselves give rise to unjust social

⁶⁹ Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, “Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei”; Marx/Engels, *Werke* IV (Berlin: Dietz, 1959), 493.

or political structures or superstitions, then the absolute fulfilment of Enlightenment rationality necessitated its radical self-negation – a “proletarian” Enlightenment to rationalize the spirit of “bourgeois” Enlightenment. The *Communist Manifesto* developed precisely such an argument through its critique of the bourgeoisie’s “ideological standpoint,” claiming that the “Enlightenment ideas [*Aufklärungsideen*] ... such as freedom, justice, etc.,” which the “revolutionary bourgeoisie” had regarded as “eternal truths ... common to all social conditions,” were in fact a direct expression of capitalist “property relations” (bourgeois “freedom” was essentially the freedom to buy and sell property, and so on), and would necessarily vanish with the “Communist revolution.”⁷⁰ Furthermore, this critique of “bourgeois ideology” was not based on a transcendental principle of “proletarian” justice, but on the empirical study of historical development: “The theoretical statements of the Communists are in no way based upon ideas ... invented or discovered by this or that world-reformer. They are merely the general expression of the factual relations within an existing class struggle, a historical movement going on before our eyes.”⁷¹

The potential contradiction inherent to this notion of “proletarian revolution” is obvious: it seems to simultaneously oppose and continue “Enlightenment” rationality. Much therefore depends on whether or not Marx and Engels’ critique of bourgeois ideals (“freedom, justice, etc.”) applied to the values underpinning rational discourse itself – for example, “truth.” If such values were included within the critique, then it is unclear how proletarian revolution could possibly represent a continuation of bourgeois Enlightenment; it would instead have to be posed as an irrationalist negation of bourgeois reason. However, if such values were excluded from the critique, and a kernel of social rationality was therefore shared by both bourgeois and proletarian Enlightenment, then it is unclear why Enlightenment required the radical negation

⁷⁰ Ibid., 480-81.

⁷¹ Ibid., 474-75.

of proletarian revolution at all – for it should, in principle, have been able to rationalize itself. In this regard, the standpoint of the *Manifesto* rested upon the ambivalence of these possibilities. The list of bourgeois values under criticism – “freedom, justice, etc.” – did not explicitly include or exclude empirical “rationality.” The text could therefore slip between two distinct logics: “proletarian revolution” could be represented as both the radical *destruction* of bourgeois-revolutionary Enlightenment, whilst “Communist revolution” could be represented as its radical *continuation*.

Of course, the “proletarian revolution” and “Communist revolution” were, for Marx, notionally identical: “The Communists ... have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole.”⁷² According to what is usually seen as the core logic of Marxist theory, the proletariat becomes “Communist” as it attains greater consciousness of its economic condition and historical role under capitalism; the Communist standpoint is the full realization of the proletarian standpoint. On this basis, the asymmetrical relationship of the “proletarian” and “Communist” to bourgeois Enlightenment would seem to present a problem; it would suggest that, as its consciousness approaches the Communist ideal, the proletariat softens its attitude towards bourgeois values. However, a potential resolution comes from Balibar’s argument that Marx’s concept of the “proletariat” vacillated between representing the “particular interest” of a social *class* and the “general interest” of the social *mass*. In becoming “Communist,” the proletariat did not merely become more advanced in its self-consciousness; it also became involved in the mass-organizational politics of the notional “Communist Party.” The implicit attitude of the *Manifesto* towards Enlightenment might thus be summarized as follows: on one hand, the “particular interest” of the proletariat as a “class” under capitalism highlighted the sociopolitical limitations of bourgeois Enlightenment as a revolutionary ideology; on the other, the proletariat as a Communist “mass” could continue the

⁷² Ibid., 474.

Enlightenment project by pursuing the “general interest” of society through its institutional activity – for example, disseminating the *Manifesto* itself.

By situating the *Communist Manifesto* within the conceptual history of “revolution,” I have attempted to show how elements of the mass-organizational logic that characterized the revolutionary doctrines of the Second International era were *already implicitly present* in Marx’s conception of “proletarian revolution.” This argument must now be extended to nineteenth-century anarchist doctrine, which will require further discussion of the concept of the “proletariat.” Of course, “proletarian revolution” is often strictly identified with its Marxist sense, denoting a revolution in which the industrial-capitalist working class plays the sole or leading role. This implies a certain notion of how the modern (nineteenth-century) concept of the “proletariat” arose: namely, through the recognition of objective, structural transformations of the working classes due to the effects of capitalist industrialization. Marx was not the first social theorist to name this phenomenon, but his dialectical theory of social development was perhaps the first to imbue this emergent class with “revolutionary” significance.⁷³ As such, the *Communist Manifesto* would indeed represent the canonical expression of “proletarian revolution”: “The advance of industry, whose unwitting and unresisting bearer is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the workers ... with its revolutionary union through association. ... [The bourgeoisie] produces ... its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the triumph of the proletariat are equally inevitable.”⁷⁴

In accordance with this definition, the “classical” anarchist standpoint is often regarded as the antithesis of “proletarian revolution” as such. Broadly speaking, anarchists recognized the “revolutionary potential of a wide variety of ... social groups” rather than focusing on a

⁷³ An analysis along these lines is developed in: Werner Conze, “Vom ‘Pöbel’ zum ‘Proletariat’: Sozialgeschichtliche Voraussetzungen für den Sozialismus in Deutschland”; *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 41.4 (1954), 333-64.

⁷⁴ Marx & Engels, “Manifest”; 473-74.

single class, and envisaged “spontaneous uprisings” rather than a structural transformation of society.⁷⁵ For this reason, Ralph Darlington argues that the revolutionary syndicalists’ emphasis on the capitalist working class as a revolutionary agent was indicative of a “diffuse” Marxist influence mixed in with their main ideas drawn from anarchism.⁷⁶ However, the anarchist texts to be examined below made prominent use of the dichotomy of “bourgeoisie” and “proletariat” – they were thus, in some sense, visions of “proletarian revolution.” For example, Bakunin’s *Politics of the International* argued that the only prerequisite condition for membership of the International should be to recognize “that between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie there exists an antagonism that is irreconcilable ... [because] the prosperity of the bourgeois is incompatible with the well-being and liberty of the workers.”⁷⁷ Bakunin’s use of these class categories was not rooted in a rigorous theory of social or historical development; it simply designated an exploitative relationship between capitalist parasites and producers: “bourgeois domination [is] the slavery of the proletariat.”⁷⁸ This might suggest that a distinction should be drawn between the “strong” (in the sense of theoretical rigour) Marxist conception and the “weak” (in the sense of semantic plasticity) anarchist conception of “proletarian revolution.” Whereas the former represented an attempt to theorize and channel a new historical form of working-class experience, the latter was merely an interchangeable synonym for “workers” or perhaps even the “exploited” in general – in short, a rhetorical flourish. This would also apply to the revolutionary syndicalist use of the term.

Undoubtedly, the anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists used the term “proletariat” less frequently and less systematically than the Marxists. However, this usage was not entirely capricious; it is possible to identify some consistent parameters for anarcho-syndicalist “proletarian revolution.” In *Political Capacity*, Proudhon asserted that it was “the law [*droit*]

⁷⁵ Darlington, *Radical Unionism*, 69.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁷⁷ Michel Bakounine [Mikhail Bakunin], *La politique de l'Internationale* (Paris: Vie ouvrière, 1913), 1-2.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

inaugurated in [17]89” – in other words, the political regime established by the French Revolution – that had “created the entirely new distinction, unknown even in feudal times, between the bourgeois class and the working class or proletariat.”⁷⁹ Thus, for Proudhon, the “proletariat” was primarily a sociopolitical category denoting the stratum of society that had been excluded from the political rights won in 1789; the economic nature of the class as industrial-capitalist workers was strictly *secondary* to its exclusion from bourgeois right. This conception of the “proletariat” was the basis for a distinctive, anti-political conception of class struggle, rooted in the notion that “promises of political liberty and equality” (in other words, the values of 1789) were primarily employed by the bourgeoisie as a way of diverting the proletariat from its true interests. For this reason, Bakunin’s vision of “proletarian revolution” was that of a purely “economic” struggle led by the workers themselves, who had to reject and liberate themselves from the “bourgeois socialist” emphasis on “political transformation.”⁸⁰

Whilst it is questionable whether this line of argument universally characterized anarchist doctrine, it was undoubtedly key to the anarchist influence upon French revolutionary syndicalism. Fernand Pelloutier invoked Proudhon’s *Political Capacity* in an 1892 analysis of the general strike, before arguing that past revolutions had never contributed towards “the emancipation of the proletariat,” but merely created the illusion of liberty – a “fictive sovereignty.”⁸¹ In Émile Pouget’s 1903 pamphlet *The Bases of Syndicalism*, syndicalism was defined as the “result and culmination of a whole century of struggle” through which “the proletariat has made an effort to disengage its action from that of purely political bourgeois parties” – a struggle made difficult by the fact that the Machievellian bourgeoisie had, since 1789, wilfully sought to “divert” the workers “from the study of economic questions . . . towards the underwhelming aspirations of democratism,” thereby protecting its political power.⁸² The

⁷⁹ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *De la capacité politique des classes ouvrières* (Paris: Dentu, 1865), 61.

⁸⁰ Bakunin, *Politique*, 13.

⁸¹ Fernand Pelloutier & Aristide Briand, “De la révolution par la grève générale”; *FP*, 292-93.

⁸² Émile Pouget, “Les bases du syndicalisme”; *L’action directe*, 56-57.

antithesis to bourgeois-democratic politics was, of course, “direct action.” Here we may even invoke Sorel’s wish for the “development of a juridical conscience within the proletariat ... as a means by which the decadence and purely utilitarian ethics of his day could be put to an end”;⁸³ here, too, the primary significance of the proletariat was not economic but related to the nature of bourgeois “law” and its attendant values.

This conception of “proletarian revolution” could perhaps only have obtained coherence and significance in the French context, as a kind of antidote to the prevalent sociopolitical values of post-1789 bourgeois Republicanism. Indeed, it essentially defined the “proletariat” as a section of French society. To this we can attribute Lagardelle’s view that:

It is not a historical accident that has given birth to syndicalism in France. ... The realization of the ... democratic regime, which has given socialist parties free access to power, ... could not but open the eyes of proletarians. ... [T]hey have recognized that democratic government ... [is] identical and equal to all governments ... they have broken with democracy and retrenched within their own organizations.⁸⁴

We might therefore be tempted to regard the anarcho-syndicalist notion of “proletarian revolution” as a national peculiarity (reflecting the relative strength of the French anarchist tradition), in comparison to Marx’s universalist notion of “proletarian revolution” as an objective social-structural phenomenon. However, if we dig further into Marx’s canon, his

⁸³ Jennings, *Syndicalism in France*, 58.

⁸⁴ Hubert Lagardelle, “Avant-propos”; *Syndicalisme et socialisme*, 6.

conception of the “proletariat” turns out to be a specifically “German” phenomenon – which was, moreover, explicitly defined by its exclusion from the political effects of 1789.

In the introduction to his “Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right” (1844), Marx asserted that revolutionary history would develop along different lines in France and Germany. In the modern, politically “idealist” nation of France, where each revolutionary class expressed its interests in ideal terms that could be picked up and extended by the next, the emancipation of society would proceed as a “dramatic” series of political revolutions leading from “partial” to “universal” emancipation. This process had begun, of course, in 1789. However, the stunted political development of Germany meant that it could not generate its revolutions through such “idealism,” and its ultimate revolutionary transformation could only occur in a single stroke through the “proletariat” – here defined as *any* class whose immediate, material conditions of emancipation corresponded precisely to the conditions for social emancipation as a whole.⁸⁵ Of course, Marx would *subsequently* identify the emergent industrial working class in Germany as apt to perform this role. Marx’s initial conception of “proletarian revolution” was thus a kind of formal resolution to the political backwardness of Germany in comparison to revolutionary France. His subsequent theorization of the proletariat as an objective social phenomenon was, at a certain level, an attempt to fulfil this “German” destiny.

The standpoint of German orthodox Marxism must be viewed in this light. Its notion of “scientific socialism” was not simply a deterministic rendition of Marx’s theory of capitalist development, but also echoed his framing of “Germany” as the destinal site of “proletarian revolution” in the sense of a self-realizing emancipation of society, rooted in economic materiality rather than political ideality. Here we can consider, for example, Engels’ characterization (in 1882) of “scientific socialism” as “an essentially German product,”⁸⁶ and

⁸⁵ Karl Marx, “Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie – Einleitung”; Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels, *Werke* I (Berlin: Dietz, 1976), 389-91.

⁸⁶ Friedrich Engels, “Die Entwicklung des Sozialismus von der Utopie zur Wissenschaft [1882]”; Marx/Engels, *Werke* XIX (Berlin: Dietz, 1962), 187.

his claim (in 1886) that the “German workers’ movement is the heir of German classical philosophy.”⁸⁷ In an article presenting his draft of the “Erfurt Programme,” Kautsky noted that “particularly favourable conditions were ... present for Germany to possess a scientific socialist literature of a significance and scope that no other country has come close to exhibiting.”⁸⁸ We might therefore say that a certain element of the “institutional mythology” of the SPD had its roots in Marx’s foundational conception of the proletariat.

In summary, beneath their explicit disparities, the Marxist and anarchist conceptions of “proletarian revolution” shared a fundamental aspect that was crucial to their influence upon German orthodox Marxism and French revolutionary syndicalism. Both defined the “proletariat” against the perceived incompleteness or insufficiency of the “bourgeois” 1789 Revolution – in other words, a gap between bourgeois Enlightenment and the integral emancipation of society, which it was left to the “proletarian revolution” to realize in full. The Marxist and anarchist responses to this “incompletion” both sought to apply the immediate economic interests of the proletariat instead of the political idealism of bourgeois revolutionaries, but framed this vision in different ways. The anarchist response was formed from a “French” perspective, which advocated a wholesale rejection of dominant bourgeois-republican values and the established “political” domain – it was necessary for the economic proletarian struggle to be completely freed from the dead weight of the regime and ideals established in 1789. Conversely, the distinctively “German” problem confronted by Marx was that of achieving the same revolutionary history as France, but without the same resources of political modernity – thus, the proletariat’s economic self-consciousness was posited as a kind of surrogate for the political idealism of the French Revolution. This post-1789 aspect of “proletarian revolution” not only influenced the concepts of “scientific socialism” and “direct

⁸⁷ Engels, “Feuerbach”; 307.

⁸⁸ Kautsky, “Entwurf [1/4]”; 724.

action,” but also, through their national specificity, provided an initial spur for what are often regarded as the self-aggrandizing mythologies of the SPD and CGT.

I have argued that the Marxist and anarchist conceptions of “proletarian revolution” were each constitutively shaped by a logic that primarily responded to the “bourgeois” ideals of 1789 rather than the objective phenomenon of the industrial-capitalist working class. To fully comprehend how classical Marxism and anarchism influenced “scientific socialism” and “direct action” as mass-organizational modes of proletarian enlightenment, it must now be shown how the aforementioned writings of Marx and Proudhon articulated this logic in an “institutional” form. This might seem to be a strange claim, since neither had strong ties to a particular organization: in Marx’s case, the “Communist party” represented by the *Manifesto* was purely notional, and the Communist League in whose name he and Engels produced the text was no more than a small coterie of exiled intellectuals; in Proudhon’s case, strong attachment to a particular organization would have perhaps contradicted the principles of his anarchism. However, I will argue that the *Communist Manifesto* and Proudhon’s *Political Capacity* each effectively formulated an institutional logic by conceiving and founding a genre of *proletarian literature*. It has already been discussed how the institutional values of German orthodox Marxism and French revolutionary syndicalism were closely tied to what might be called “literary” problems, particularly in relation to the “popularization” of revolutionary theory.

As already mentioned, the “Communist party” of Marx and Engels’ *Manifesto* was a notional rather than concrete entity, and little indication was given regarding its specific form or mode of activity – for instance, whether and how it should participate in the established parliamentary system. Its institutional nature was entirely subordinate to the theoretical principles of the *Manifesto*. Since the bourgeois “political arena” was organized into political parties, the laws

of dialectical development – particularly given that it was fractions of the bourgeoisie itself that had, for their own political purposes, drawn the workers into a “political movement” – entailed that the proletariat would initially assert its political force in the same “party” form.⁸⁹ Secondly, it was stated that the Communists would not constitute a “special party opposed to the other workers’ parties,” but would rather form “the most decisive and ever forward-driving section of the workers’ parties in all countries”; as such, the “Communist” party had no specific characteristics beyond its task of representing the “interests of the entire proletariat,” with the aid of theoretical “insight” into its historical development.⁹⁰ In short, the “Communist party” of the *Manifesto* would seem to be a name rather than a fully-developed concept for a proletarian institution.

The influence of the *Manifesto* upon “the subsequent development of working-class parties in Western Europe” is generally viewed in this light. For Stuart Wilks-Heeg, whilst the *Manifesto* did stress the role of “political parties” as “essential agents in the workers’ struggle,” thereby giving rise to a “dominant ... assumption within the labour movement” regarding the necessity of political organization, it provided only a “partial” and “limited” idea of the party’s institutional “role.”⁹¹ Consequently, the fact that many workers’ parties subsequently followed a “reformist” rather than “revolutionary” route, despite claiming to being influenced by the *Manifesto*, could be attributed to the theoretical vacuum of the “Communist party” allowing leaders of the workers’ movement to pursue the path of electoral moderation for pragmatic reasons.⁹² From this perspective, the institutional logic of the Social Democratic workers’ party was essentially a matter of practical considerations being grafted on to the ambiguous “Communist” vision of the *Manifesto*.

⁸⁹ Marx/Engels, “Manifest”; 472.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 474.

⁹¹ Stuart Wilks-Heeg, “The Communist Manifesto and Working-class Parties in Western Europe”; Mark Cowling (ed.), *The Communist Manifesto: New interpretations* (Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 119-20.

⁹² Ibid., 127-28.

However, although the *Manifesto* did not explicitly specify the institutional role of the “Communist party,” it developed an implicit institutional logic through its conception of “Communist literature.” This can be linked to what Martin Puchner calls the “performativity” of the *Manifesto* as a textual “act of self-foundation”:⁹³ “The *Manifesto* is not content with simply being a proxy [representation] of the proletariat Rather, it needs to create, performatively, the proletariat as a self-conscious agent.”⁹⁴ In other words, the implications of the *Manifesto* as a historic act of writing were incorporated into its political content; the prospective impact of the manifesto-text upon the consciousness of the workers was an integral component of its vision of “proletarian revolution.” The political function of the “Communist party” was not indicated by the theoretical content of the *Manifesto*, but implied by its textual-political form. This point can be established by examining the significance of the term “literature” within its argumentation.

The first chapter of the *Manifesto* outlined Marx’s dialectical view of social development. Its first half described the bourgeoisie’s revolutionary transformation of feudal society into modern capitalist society. Its second half then outlined how, through all of these transformations – which both intensified the exploitation of workers and created the technical conditions for their unification – the bourgeois class was generating its own dialectical antithesis: the revolutionary proletariat. However, this argument was not elaborated to its logical end. Marx and Engels noted that bourgeois capitalism had revolutionized not only “material” but also “intellectual production”; by expanding commerce into a “world market” and thereby demolishing “local and national self-sufficiency,” the bourgeoisie had torn down communicative and intellectual barriers, creating an international flow of ideas – a “world literature.”⁹⁵ Yet in the subsequent outline of how bourgeois society was dialectically

⁹³ Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution* (Princeton University Press, 2005), 1-3.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 31.

⁹⁵ Marx/Engels, “Manifest”; 466.

generating the revolutionary force of the proletariat, the argument stopped at the national level: “the advancing means of communication that are created by modern industry ... centralize the many local struggles [of the workers] ... into a national class struggle.”⁹⁶ The obvious conclusion that “world literature” would then be able to unify these national struggles into an international proletarian movement was left unstated.

Here the performativity of the *Manifesto* entered the picture. In its preamble, the Manifesto clearly identified itself as an example of “world literature,” a product of the international exchange of ideas: “Communists of various nationalities have assembled ... and sketched the following manifesto, which will be published in English, French, German”⁹⁷ Furthermore, its aim was clearly to complete the formation of the proletariat: “Proletarians of all countries, unite!” It was thus the literary act of the *Manifesto* itself that would enact the final stage of its own dialectical logic. We can now reframe the aforementioned distinction between “proletarian revolution” and “Communist revolution”: the former did not simply develop into the latter as it gained in theoretical consciousness; rather, the “Communist revolution” specifically referred to a “proletarian revolution” upon which the world-literary form of the *Communist Manifesto* had taken effect. Whilst a “proletarian revolution” without the intervention of the *Manifesto* would still arise through the dialectical development of proletarian class struggle within capitalist society, the “Communist revolution” could be accelerated by using its institutionalized “world literature” to address the proletariat as a mass readership.

It can now be explained how, whilst the “proletarian revolution” entailed a wholesale rejection of the values of bourgeois Enlightenment, the “Communist revolution” would, in a certain sense, continue and complete the Enlightenment project. The key point was that

⁹⁶ Ibid., 471.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 461.

Communist “world literature” did not transmit Enlightenment values through its theoretical content, which was exclusively “proletarian” in nature; it belonged to Enlightenment only in terms of its literary form – which is to say, its scientific form. The parameters of this *formal claim to Enlightenment* were set out in the third chapter of the *Manifesto*, on “Socialist and Communist Literature.” This chapter developed an ideological critique of the extant revolutionary literature – again with the implication that the *Manifesto* itself provided the solution to the problems it identified. The two main sections of this critique addressed the genres of “reactionary socialism,” which was produced by the non-proletarian (aristocratic or *petit bourgeois*) opponents of bourgeois capitalism, and “critical-utopian socialism,” which was produced by the proletarian movement at an early, inchoate stage of its struggle. The former was “reactionary” as it sought to reverse the bourgeois transformation of society by reversion to an earlier pre-capitalist state, rather than advancing through the dialectical emergence of the proletariat. The latter was “utopian” because, addressing an immature proletariat that had yet to develop “historical self-sufficiency [*Selbsttätigkeit*]” or a “distinctive [*eigentlich*] political movement,” it placed its hope in speculative plans and blueprints of the future society.⁹⁸

Crucially, both of these limitations within the existing revolutionary literature were not merely matters of theoretical content, but also tied to questions of *literary form*. The writings of both “reactionary” and “critical-utopian” socialism were necessarily – due to their class standpoint and historical circumstances – characterized by philosophical or literary *abstraction* from the concrete phenomenon of class struggle. The political maturation of the proletarian struggle meant that the *Manifesto* had no need for such speculative distance; Communist literature could simply outline the tendencies of a class struggle occurring “before our eyes.” In this sense, the “Communist revolution” entailed a radicalization of Enlightenment rationality;

⁹⁸ Ibid., 490.

it was a materialist rationalization of a residual element of irrationality within post-Enlightenment literature – the literary authority of “ideal” concepts abstracted from reality. For example, as utopian visions of social transformation became increasingly incompatible with the course of modern “historical development,” they retained a certain authority “through fanatical superstitions in the miraculous efficacy of their social science” – in other words, by virtue of their literary articulation.⁹⁹

This notion of Communist literature was crystallized in a section of Marx and Engels’ discussion of “reactionary socialism” that dealt specifically with “German” socialism. Significantly, their criticism of German socialism prior to 1848 was *primarily* related to its speculative literary form, and only *secondarily* a matter of its class standpoint. Furthermore, this critique can be linked to Marx’s primordial logic of “proletarian revolution” as a specifically German phenomenon responding to its exclusion from the French modernity of 1789:

The socialist and communist literature of France, which arose under the oppression of a ruling bourgeoisie and was the literary expression of the struggle against this rule, was transferred to Germany at a time when the bourgeoisie was just beginning its struggle against feudal absolutism.

German philosophers, half-philosophers, and aesthetes eagerly seized upon this literature and only forgot that, with the migration of these writings from France, the French living conditions did not simultaneously migrate to Germany. Confronting German conditions, the French literature lost all

⁹⁹ Ibid., 491.

immediate practical significance, and took on a purely literary aspect. ... Thus, for the German philosophers ... , the demands of the first French Revolution represented the demands of “practical reason” in general, and the expressed will of the French bourgeoisie signified ... the veritable will of humanity.¹⁰⁰

The proletarian “world literature” inaugurated by the *Communist Manifesto* would rationalize German Enlightenment thought by restoring its connection to a concrete class struggle. Engels’ characterization of the German proletariat as the heir to classical German philosophy was undoubtedly rooted in this notion of radical Enlightenment. Marxist “scientific socialism” is generally viewed in terms of placing socialism on scientific grounds. For Kurt Bayertz, “the expression ‘scientific socialism’ ... signified ... the objective grounding of socialist aims”; its “distancing from utopia ... had a clear goal: it was to endow socialist theory ... with the same claim to objectivity that is characteristic of natural science.”¹⁰¹ However, as an institutionalized continuation of the literary politics of the *Communist Manifesto*, it can equally be viewed as an attempt to radically rationalize “science” by grounding its literary form in the social reality of class struggle.

Between its critiques of “reactionary” and “critical-utopian” socialism, the *Manifesto* briefly dealt with “bourgeois” socialism – a mode of socialism that sought to preserve the conditions of modern bourgeois society by ameliorating its revolutionary tendencies through reform.¹⁰² Proudhon was cited as the typical representative of this genre. From this starting point, it can be argued that Proudhon also inaugurated a genre of proletarian-revolutionary literature in

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 485-86.

¹⁰¹ Kurt Bayertz, “Naturwissenschaft und Sozialismus: Tendenzen der Naturwissenschafts-Rezeption in der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung des 19. Jahrhunderts”; *Social Studies of Science* 13.3 (August 1983), 367.

¹⁰² Marx/Engels, “Manifest”; 488.

Political Capacity, in which he was compelled to depart from the “bourgeois” standpoint of his earlier texts (those written around the time of the *Manifesto*). We can begin by considering an example of Proudhon’s bourgeois literature: his *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century* (1851), whose foreword explicitly addressed the text “To the Bourgeoisie.” This foreword began by paying homage to the bourgeoisie as “intrepid ... revolutionaries,” celebrating their achievement of “revolutionary ideas” against traditional “despotism”: “liberty of the press, liberty of association, liberty of commerce and industry.” Notably, these achievements were all conceived as essentially political or juridical in nature – even the introduction of capitalism was framed as the establishment of a legal freedom. In light of its glorious revolutionary past, Proudhon questioned the bourgeoisie’s reactionary attitude towards the proletariat, particularly during the 1848 uprisings. The proletariat was, for Proudhon, a political “novice” that viewed the revolutionary bourgeoisie as “their masters and models.” Yet, during the uprisings of 1848, instead of providing political “tutelage to the proletariat,” initiating them into “political life,” the bourgeoisie had treated these “naïve revolutionaries like a herd of marauders and scoundrels,” and had thus become complicit in their repression. Proudhon called upon the bourgeoisie to reclaim its revolutionary heritage as the democratic agent of sociopolitical progress, and therefore to establish a “reconciliation with the proletariat.”¹⁰³

The “general idea of revolution” outlined in the main body of Proudhon’s text was to form the intellectual basis of this “reconciliation.” He began by arguing that the 1789 Revolution had only completed half the job of social liberation, as evidenced by the “poverty” and “shortage of employment” that had driven the proletariat’s to intervene in the bourgeois uprising of 1848.¹⁰⁴ The revolutionary ideas of 1789 had to be expanded such that the

¹⁰³ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Idée générale de la révolution au XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Garnier, 1851), i-v.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

democratic political rights of the Republic would also begin to take effect in the domain of economic production. This entailed that the social “principle of authority” would have to be superseded by a “principle of association,” ultimately leading to the “dissolution of government into the economic organism.”¹⁰⁵ Proudhon’s prefatory call “to the bourgeoisie” implied that he regarded this “general idea of revolution” as wholly consistent with the Enlightenment values and rationality of the Republic – it was simply their extension into questions of economic organization. Proudhon’s theory provided a ideological basis for the bourgeoisie to recognize the revolutionary significance of the proletariat’s economic demands, and thus to take up the task of inducting the proletariat into the political life of the Republic.

Proudhon’s *Political Capacity* marked the death of this hope for “reconciliation.” The bourgeoisie had continued its political repression of the proletariat – not only in terms of its attitude towards revolutionary uprisings, but also through the day-to-day functions of the democratic-republican regime. Hence the exclusion of the “proletariat” from the political rights won in 1789 was no longer conceived as an accidental oversight, but as an inherent limitation within the bourgeois legal order. Proudhon outlined at length how the republican government was becoming totally incapable of dealing with questions of economic organization – or even of truly sustaining the political ideals of bourgeois Enlightenment. The Republic was in a state of decadence: “the superior class [had] lost the sense and direction” of “political life,” and was no longer in a position to provide political tutelage to the proletariat. As such, the only hope for sociopolitical progress was for the “political capacity” of the workers themselves – for the proletariat to achieve “consciousness of itself and its Idea” in an autonomous or autodidactic manner, and to elaborate the principles of a new “labour Democracy.”¹⁰⁶ The revolutionary “idea” upon which this proletarian politics would be based – namely, the “idea of mutuality” –

¹⁰⁵ These were the titles of the third, fourth, and seventh chapters of the book.

¹⁰⁶ Proudhon, *Capacité*, 7.

was essentially identical to the “principle of association” outlined in *General Idea*. The difference was that, whereas “association” represented the extension of democratic politics to the economic sphere, the theory of “mutualism” moved in the opposite direction – originating at the level of workers’ economic co-operatives, Proudhon argued that it could be extended into a radical principle of democratic governance.¹⁰⁷

What must now be considered is the literary framing of this “idea.” In Proudhon’s earlier bourgeois literature, it was conceived that the bourgeoisie as a mature sociopolitical class – the class of revolutionary Enlightenment – would not only be receptive to his theory, but would also, through its political “tutelage” of the proletariat, be responsible for disseminating the idea amongst the workers. The revolutionary efficacy of Proudhon’s “idea” rested upon its active dissemination by the “model” class of society, the Enlightened bourgeoisie. Hence, the text was not merely targeted but *explicitly addressed* to this class. Clearly, the observations of *Political Capacity* meant that this bourgeois-literary dynamic had to be replaced. However, the text was not simply addressed “to the proletariat” instead – to be able to comprehend and enact Proudhon’s social theory would imply that the workers were already in possession of the “political capacity” that Proudhon was seeking to produce through his theory.

Proudhon’s crucial conceit in this regard was what he called the “[s]pontaneity of the idea of mutuality within the modern masses.”¹⁰⁸ The immediate meaning of this formula was that the workers’ participation in various co-operative organizations, including “societies of mutual credit [or] mutual aid,” were a sign “that the mutualist idea has penetrated, in a new and original fashion, the working classes.”¹⁰⁹ Thus, the workers did not require a special political training in the tenets of mutualism; the idea was inherent to their economic organizations. (Here

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 181-94.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 84.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 89-90.

it should be noted that mutuality, for Proudhon, was linked to an organic and rational division of productive labour: “separation of industries, specialization of functions.”¹¹⁰) However, if this was the only factor in the “spontaneity” of the political development of the proletariat, it would render Proudhon’s own writing as a superfluous, passive observer to the process. Furthermore, he had linked the “spontaneity” of the idea not merely to the “working classes” but to the “modern masses.” The literary-political effect of Proudhon’s mutualist theory rested upon this differentiation.

It must be recalled that Proudhon’s definition of the “proletariat” was primarily political; the incomplete Enlightenment of 1789 had “created” the class. As such, the proletariat was not essentially identical with the “working classes.” Rather, the workers represented a particular section of the “people” or “masses” who were excluded from the liberties of the Republic. “Proletarian revolution” meant the liberation of this proletarian “mass,” not just the worker “class.” The purpose of Proudhon’s text was to elaborate the mutualist idea implied by the workers’ institutions into an ideological basis for mobilizing the “proletariat” *en masse*. Through their practical response to the “economic anarchy of the bourgeois,” the workers had given expression to “the principle of mutuality”; “[t]he working classes have delivered their secret to us.” Having brought “[t]his idea ... into the light of day” and demonstrated its practical force, the workers’ doctrinal contribution to the proletarian revolution was complete; the rest would be performed by Proudhon’s anarchist literature:

... we have no further need to interrogate the working classes concerning their thoughts about the future. ... We can, ... better than them, interrogate the universal consciousness through reason

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 93.

[*raisonnement*], reveal its tendencies, and place before the eyes
of the masses their destiny.¹¹¹

The genre of proletarian-revolutionary literature inaugurated by *Political Capacity* was, in essence, a theoretical elaboration of the practical example provided by the working classes, creating a new doctrine that would liberate the proletarian “masses” – which meant, in effect, to perfect the values of revolutionary Enlightenment.

The “spontaneous” mutuality of the workers could produce such a doctrine because, Proudhon claimed, it crystallized a sovereign notion of “justice” that already existed in diffuse form throughout the history of religious and philosophical thought: “it is this Justice that the labour Democracy, in its wholly spontaneous intuition, ... invokes today, although still obscurely, under the name of mutuality.” As such, working-class mutualism had not only been able to extend the political values of 1789 into the economic sphere; it had also unearthed a basis for the *secular morality* that the Great Revolution had sought (and failed) to establish through its glorification of citizenship and the State. The practical principle of popular “confederation” could, through its intrinsic mutualism, found a “religion of Justice,” forming a basis for the “new order, which the French Revolution ... was [originally] called upon to establish.”¹¹²

In summary, Proudhon’s proletarian literature did not seek to address the “working classes”; the practical “spontaneity” of their economic organizations required no theoretical assistance, and was left to unfold according to its own initiative. Instead, by developing a philosophical elaboration of the “mutualism” practically exemplified by these organizations, his anarchist writing sought to apply the workers’ “intuitive” principles of justice and morality

¹¹¹ Ibid., 100.

¹¹² Ibid., 97.

to the broader sociopolitical task of liberating the proletarian “masses” (in other words, the “people”), and thus complete the unfinished project of bourgeois Enlightenment. This logic provides a framework for approaching the perplexities of syndicalist “direct action.” Revolutionary syndicalism also emphasized the self-sufficiency of autonomous working-class institutions; syndical associations emerged “spontaneously and without any preconceived idea,” and were furthermore recalcitrant to bourgeois-socialist tutelage.¹¹³ The syndicalist doctrine of “direct action” was thus, like Proudhon’s anarchist literature, an extrinsic theoretical elaboration of the intrinsic principles or intuitive morality that the syndical associations exemplified through their organic, practical activity. However, whereas Proudhon addressed the practical lessons of “working class” activity to a different audience – namely, the proletarian “masses” – French revolutionary syndicalism addressed the idea of “direct action” back to the workers themselves.

What was the purpose of representing the doctrine of syndicalist “direct action” to the same proletariat from which syndical activity had organically emanated? What could the workers learn from their own practice? Here it might be argued (with justice) that the purported “spontaneity” of syndical action was purely rhetorical, and the revolutionary syndicalists were, in truth, seeking to impose an abstract conception upon worker activity. However, the writings of revolutionary syndicalism also offered two coherent reasons for this seemingly circular act of ideological representation. One explicit justification was that the “working class” overlapped with the “democratic mass”; some workers’ instincts for economic self-defence had been suppressed or pacified by the values of bourgeois democracy, and therefore required the example of the “conscious minority” to reawaken their capacity for syndicalist “direct action.” However, a broader justification that underlay the discourse of French revolutionary

¹¹³ Pouget, “Le parti du Travail”; 122.

syndicalism as a whole was the *empiricism* of “direct action” – that is to say, its social-scientific significance.

For Pouget, syndicalism emerged when “the workers ... elaborated a sane and truly human doctrine [with] its roots in the faithful ascertainment and interpretation of social phenomena.”¹¹⁴ This empirical “sobriety” meant that it was not freighted with abstract “philosophical” or “political” values that could form a “doctrinal barrier” to co-operation; syndicalism thus constituted “the practical quintessence of diverse social doctrines.”¹¹⁵ Couched as a quasi-scientific discourse on the “social question,” revolutionary syndicalism could claim the same “universal” sociopolitical significance as that of Proudhon’s anarchist literature. For example, Pelloutier contributed a study of French working life to the *Bibliothèque internationale des sciences sociologiques*, a series edited by the anarchist Augustin Hamon. A generic blurb, presumably written by Hamon, explained the rationale behind this project:

The public is justly preoccupied by social questions. Rich and poor, learned and ignorant alike are interested. The necessity of studying and resolving these questions imposes itself on all. ... This universalization of sociological sciences will put an end to the social disorder that affects all the contemporary forms of society.¹¹⁶

In this sense, revolutionary syndicalism was also a force for sociopolitical Enlightenment, informing the masses (“public”) rather than a particular class interest. Crucially, however, this

¹¹⁴ Pouget, “Les bases du syndicalisme”; 54.

¹¹⁵ Pouget, “La parti du Travail”; 148.

¹¹⁶ [Hamon, “La Bibliothèque internationale des Sciences sociologiques”]; Fernand Pelloutier & Marcel Pelloutier, *La vie ouvrière en France* (Paris: Schleicher, 1900), [unpaginated].

endeavour was compatible with intrinsic pedagogical functions performed by the syndicalist organizations, and could thus be integrated into the field of syndicalist “direct action” as a mode of worker (self-)education. Pelloutier himself wrote, in another context, that: “what the French worker lacks ... is the science of his suffering ... to understand the causes of his servitude.”¹¹⁷

In summary, the “classical” Marxist and anarchist traditions did not simply provide ideal doctrinal visions of “proletarian revolution,” on to which German orthodox Marxism and French revolutionary syndicalism grafted various institutional assumptions and mythologies. Particularly in relation to the sociopolitical values of 1789, the foundational Marxist and anarchist conceptions of “proletarian revolution” already harboured elements of the “mass-organizational” logic that developed in the Second International era. In Marx and Engels’ *Communist Manifesto* and Proudhon’s *Political Capacity*, this logic manifested through their implicit conceptions of proletarian-revolutionary literature, which each had an identifiable influence upon the doctrinal structures of “scientific socialism” and “direct action” respectively. I have initially suggested that orthodox Marxism and revolutionary syndicalism received and adapted this implicit logic through the concept of “science.” This point will be developed in the chapters to follow.

Proletarian internationalism: Marx/Bakunin

I will now consider the factional “Marxist” and “anarchist” standpoints that developed in the context of the First International – whose theoretical figureheads were Marx and Bakunin – and the influence of their *proletarian internationalism* upon the mass-organizational doctrines of the Second International era. The establishment of the International Workingmen’s Association obviously introduced an explicitly institutional dimension into the revolutionary

¹¹⁷ Fernand Pelloutier, “L’enseignement social: le Musée du travail”; *FP*, 497.

projects of Marxism and anarchism. However, the consequent “internationalism” of both doctrines is usually framed as a corollary or supplementary aspect, which did not substantively affect their fundamental conceptions of “proletarian revolution.” In other words, it was merely a logical extension upon their essential theories of proletarian class development, or an attempt to put these visions into practice. On one hand, the crux of “proletarian internationalism” is often identified with the statement of the *Communist Manifesto* that “the workers have no fatherland,” which is taken to mean that the workers’ increasing “awareness of their common conditions” under capitalism “would come to outweigh any distinct national identity.”¹¹⁸ On the other, the conflict between Marx and Bakunin is generally viewed as a battle to ensure that their respective standpoints would guide the actions of the International – in other words, internationalism was a field of theoretical *assertion* rather than theoretical *elaboration*. This view of proletarian internationalism can be reconsidered in light of my preceding analysis, which has suggested that the concept of “proletarian revolution” was not a purely class-based logic, but also had an intrinsic orientation towards the “masses,” particularly as a subject or agent of sociopolitical enlightenment. In relation to the politics of the mass, the institutionality of labour internationalism – the effort to establish “a central medium of communication ... between workers’ societies” – could take on a fundamental “proletarian” significance.¹¹⁹

Again, this reinterpretation can begin from the *Communist Manifesto*. As already mentioned, the prevailing interpretation of its statement that “the workers have no fatherland” links it to the inevitable development of proletarian class consciousness under capitalism; with the global spread of capitalism, class identity would override national identity. However, we have already seen that the establishment of international proletarian unity was the precise moment at which the “Communist revolution” took over from the “proletarian revolution” as

¹¹⁸ John Schwarzmantel, “Nationalism and Socialist Internationalism”; John Breuilly (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹¹⁹ Karl Marx, “Provisional Rules [of the International Workingmen’s Association]”; *The First International and After* [“Marx’s Political Writings,” vol. 3], ed. David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2010), 83.

such. The dialectical development of the proletariat under capitalism was outlined up to the point of establishing *national* workers' parties, at which point the political effects of Communist "world literature" – that is, the *Manifesto* itself – came into operation. The proletarian internationalism of the *Manifesto* belonged to the mass-organizational logic of "Communist revolution," not the dialectical logic of "proletarian revolution":

The workers have no fatherland. ... Insofar as the proletariat must first of all acquire political rule [*Herrschaft*], rise to be a national class, [and] constitute itself as Nation, it is itself national – although by no means in the bourgeois sense.

National differences and antagonisms between peoples are already vanishing more and more with the development of the bourgeoisie, with the world market, ... with the uniformity of industrial production and its corresponding conditions of life. [Notably, the *Manifesto* did not refer to "world literature" in this passage.]

The rule of the proletariat will make them vanish faster still. United action, at least of the most civilized [*zivilisierten*] countries, is one of the first conditions for its emancipation.¹²⁰

The dialectical logic of proletarian development entailed that every social transformation created by bourgeois capitalism increased the unity and consciousness of the working classes. In this passage, however, the vanishing of "national differences" under capitalism was not something that *affected* the proletariat; rather, it was claimed that the political activity of the

¹²⁰ Ibid., 479.

proletariat would *accelerate* the process. (Elided at this point was the effect of “world literature” – which is to say, the effect of the *Manifesto* itself being read.) Furthermore, whereas the bourgeoisie’s destruction of nationality was an unintended consequence of its economic activity (creating the “world market”), the proletariat would produce the same effect *intentionally* through a conscious political “action” linked to the advancement of society (involving “the most civilized countries”). Communist internationalism therefore entailed that the proletariat – having established a political movement at the national level, and then read the *Communist Manifesto* – would inherit the sociopolitical role of the bourgeoisie and raise it to a higher level.

The “Provisional Rules” and “Inaugural Address” that Marx wrote (in English) for the First International in 1864 can be interpreted in this light. According to most accounts, Marx pragmatically compromised the revolutionary tone of these texts in order to widen their appeal as far as possible, and to ensure the participation of the strong British unions in particular; accordingly, the “revolutionary language and programme of the *Communist Manifesto* were left out” of these foundational documents.¹²¹ It is generally held that Marx intended to use this “lowest common denominator” of ideological unity as an initial springboard, envisaging that international co-operation would develop the proletarian class-consciousness of the workers, and thus bring them organically to the standpoint of the *Manifesto*.¹²² Broadly speaking, this was probably the case; however, my analysis suggests an additional nuance. In excluding the dialectical “class” logic of the *Manifesto* from his internationalist writings, Marx did not thereby eradicate all traces of “proletarian revolution.” Instead, these texts accentuated the implicit, mass-organizational dimension of proletarian development whose basic co-ordinates I have attempted to identify. For example, Marx’s preamble to the “Provisional Rules” asserted

¹²¹ Henry Collins, “Karl Marx, the International and the British Trade Union Movement”; *Science and Society* 26.4 (Autumn 1962), 404.

¹²² Thomas, *Karl Marx and the Anarchists* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 257-67.

“[t]hat the emancipation of labour is neither a local nor a national, but a social problem, embracing all countries in which modern society exists, and depending for its solution on the concurrence, practical and theoretical, of the most advanced countries.”¹²³ This corresponded precisely to the “united action” of the international proletariat which the *Manifesto* had described not as a dialectical consequence of bourgeois-capitalist globalization but as a *conscious acceleration* of this process. Furthermore, this conscious action was not merely directed towards the emancipation of the proletariat itself, but also towards a kind of sociopolitical enlightenment – the “practical and theoretical” resolution of a “social problem” inherent to “modern society.” In short, Marx’s proletarian internationalism entailed a “Communist revolution” without the proletarian class; it isolated the aspect of “proletarian revolution” that was tied to the textual form rather than the theoretical content of the *Manifesto*.

However, I have been arguing that this aspect of Marx’s revolutionary doctrine was tied to the literary performativity of the *Manifesto* itself. How, in the absence of the text, could this logic take effect within the International? Here the “Inaugural Address” played a crucial role. Its opening sentence proclaimed the “great fact that the misery of the working masses has not diminished from 1848 to 1864, and yet this period is unrivalled for the development of its industry.”¹²⁴ (We may note that this was also the period of time elapsed since the publication of the *Manifesto*.) Marx proceeded to cite empirical data and official governmental reports that demonstrated this “fact” – specifically referring to conditions in England, the leading capitalist nation – before concluding that:

In all countries of Europe it has now become a truth demonstrable
to every unprejudiced mind, and only denied by those whose

¹²³ Marx, “Provisional Rules”; 82.

¹²⁴ Karl Marx, “Inaugural Address to the International Workingmen’s Association”; *The First International and After*, 73.

interest it is to hedge other people in a fool's paradise, that no improvement of machinery, no appliance of science to production, no contrivances of communication ... will do away with the miseries of the industrious masses; but that, on the present false base, every fresh development of the productive powers of labour must tend to deepen social contrasts and ... social antagonisms.¹²⁵

Existing accounts would view this appeal to empirical social “facts” and demonstrable “truth” as a pragmatic, “lowest common denominator” appeal that retreated from the class standpoint of the *Manifesto*. Here we may highlight how Marx referred twice to the “working masses” rather than to the proletarian class. However, this passage was not a purely contrived argument; it carried implications that corresponded to the “Communist” aspect of Marx’s revolutionary doctrine. The technical advancements of capitalist production were no longer capable of resolving the “social problem” of “modern society”; a more radical advancement was therefore required, which would seem to necessitate a *socialization* of production. This was tantamount to saying that the unconscious, economically-driven advancements of the capitalist bourgeoisie were no longer capable of leading the advancement of society, and had to be replaced by an agent that would develop the means of social production in a consciously-directed fashion. We have already seen that this was precisely the role that the proletariat took on during the “Communist” and internationalist stage of its activity as described in the *Manifesto*. Accordingly, these ideas would remain at the core of German orthodox Marxism and the doctrine of the “Erfurt Programme” – even once the theory of proletarian class development had been reintroduced into the picture.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 77-78.

Marx's "Inaugural Address" thus outlined an empirical "social problem" that the proletariat in its "Communist" form – that is, a proletariat enlightened by the "world literature" of the *Communist Manifesto* – would be ideally placed to resolve. Marx then proceeded to show how the workers had already begun to take on this role – here his terminology switched from the "working masses" to the "working class." The period since the failed revolutions of 1848 had been characterized by the repression and total retreat of the working-class movement as a revolutionary political movement. However, two "compensating" victories had been gained on other fronts of the battle: firstly, "[m]ost ... continental governments" now accepted the need to reform working conditions in order to prevent a future uprising; secondly, the "cooperative movement" had performed various "great social experiments" across the "Continent." Significantly, both of these developments involved the practical example of the English workers' movement being replicated across Europe: on one hand, the wave of reformist legislation was modelled upon the Ten Hours Bill gained by the English workers' movement in 1847; on the other, the wave of co-operative activity was modelled upon schemes developed in England and "proclaimed ... in 1848." Furthermore, their significance was not purely practical. For Marx, "the Ten Hours Bill was not only a great practical success; it was the victory of a principle; it was the first time that in broad daylight the political economy of the middle class succumbed to the political economy of the working class"; and the growth of the co-operative movement was described as "a still greater victory of the political economy of labour over the political economy of property."¹²⁶ The reformist and co-operative activities of the working class constituted a kind of spontaneous "political economy of labour," which was already beginning to demonstrate its superiority to bourgeois political economy as a sociopolitical doctrine – in effect, performing the role of Marxist literature. The argument developed in Marx's "Inaugural Address" was thus surprisingly close to that of Proudhon's

¹²⁶ Ibid., 78-79.

Political Capacity: the practical co-operative activity of the “working class” furnished the sociopolitical principles through which the “masses” would be liberated.

However, despite these “compensations,” the “experience of the period from 1848 to 1864” had a final significance for Marx: namely, it showed that although they were correct in their political-economic “principle,” philanthropic reform and cooperative labour alone would still be insufficient to resolve the social problem. To “free the masses,” these modes of action would have to be extended beyond a “narrow circle ... of workmen”:

To save the industrious masses, cooperative labour ought to be developed to national dimensions Yet the lords of land and the lords of capital will always use their political privileges for the defence and perpetuation of their economical monopolies. ... To conquer political power has therefore become the great duty of the working classes. They seem to have comprehended this, for in England, Germany, Italy, and France there have taken place simultaneous revivals, and simultaneous efforts are being made at the political reorganization of the working men’s party.¹²⁷

Thus Marx formulated the *necessity of political action* as a guiding principle for the International – and this would become the crux of his subsequent conflicts with Bakunin. However, we see here that this “necessity” was not rooted in the logic of proletarian “class” development, but related entirely to the problem of the “masses.” Since the need for a socialization of production had become an immediately-perceptible matter of general experience, the practical activity of the working-class movement could realize the principles

¹²⁷ Ibid., 80.

of “political economy” without theoretical guidance – but it could not resolve the “social problem” without being extended to a “mass” scale through organized political struggle. Marx’s “Inaugural Address” thus developed a justification of party-political struggle that was detached from the logic of proletarian “class” development, and instead rooted in its “Communist” role as the historical agent of mass enlightenment. As will be seen, the German orthodox Marxists’ commitment to the SPD’s parliamentary-democratic mode of struggle was justified in similar terms. In this light, it can be argued that “scientific socialism” did not impose an institutional mythology upon the “pure” Marxist theory of dialectical proletarian development – on the contrary, it reintroduced the dimension of class into the purely mass-organizational logic of Marx’s proletarian internationalism.

This reinterpretation also places the factional conflict between Marx and Bakunin in a new light. Existing interpretations of Marx’s “Rules” and “Address” imply that they were initially accepted by the anarchists due to the purposeful suppression of Marx’s theoretical standpoint. The subsequent schism would therefore seem to represent a reassertion of their fundamental doctrinal differences. As such, the antagonism between Marx and Bakunin is often attributed to fundamental, philosophical differences – for example, their opposed attitudes towards the role of rationality within revolutionary struggle;¹²⁸ or their differing conceptions of the nation-state as essentially “political” or “cultural” in origin.¹²⁹ However, I have already suggested that Marx’s initial articulation of proletarian internationalism could have appealed to the anarchists for a more substantive reason. The notion of the economic activity of the “working classes” providing a kind of spontaneous practical model for the sociopolitical liberation of the “masses” was consonant with the Proudhonian theory of “proletarian revolution.”

¹²⁸ Thomas, *Marx and the Anarchists*, 288.

¹²⁹ Michael Forman, *Nationalism and the International Labor Movement* (Penn State Press, 2010), 22.

The key point of difference between Marx and Bakunin emerged within this framework. For Marx, the spontaneous “political economy” of the working class would equip it – as if it had read the *Communist Manifesto* – to take a further step in its development and adopt the mass-organizational political form that was necessary for it to become the revolutionary agent of sociopolitical enlightenment. By expanding its institutions to a national scale, the working class would make itself co-terminous with the masses. For Bakunin, however, the practical example of the working class would not contribute to its own development, but would be addressed directly to the “popular masses,” to awaken it from its “ignorance” and “prejudices.” He elaborated this view in his *Politics of the International* (1864):

It is necessary to distinguish between the prejudices of the popular masses of those of the privileged class. The prejudices of the masses ... are based on nothing but their ignorance and are all contrary to their interests, whereas those of the bourgeoisie are precisely founded upon the interests of that class ...¹³⁰

Thus, Bakunin’s notion was that the International would convert the working masses into the working class, rather than expanding the class to a mass scale.

The “Provisional Rules” of the International set out two key principles. Firstly, it asserted the principle of worker *self-emancipation*: “the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves,” ultimately entailing “the abolition of all class rule.” Secondly, it stated that “the economical subjection of the man of labour to the monopolizer of the means of labour” was at the root “of all social misery,” and that “economical emancipation” was therefore the “end to which every political movement ought

¹³⁰ Bakunin, *Politique*, 6.

to be subordinate as a means.”¹³¹ The conflict between Marxian and Bakuninist factions within the International was due less to dissension over the validity of these fundamental principles than to differences in their *interpretation*.

For Marx, the “subordination” of political struggle to economic aims entailed a particular theoretical orientation of “political” activity, rather than a preference for purely “economic” forms of action. At the International’s 1871 London Conference, Marx and Engels presented a forceful version of this argument in a resolution on “working-class political action,” asserting that “against th[e] collective power of the propertied classes the working class cannot act, as a class, except by constituting itself into a political party”; thus, “in the militant state of the working class, its economical movement and its political action are indissolubly united,” and the “social revolution” could not be realized by any other means.¹³²

For Bakunin, however, the same fundamental principles carried different implications. Recognizing the precept of worker self-emancipation as “the principal base of our grand Association,” Bakunin specifically glossed it as entailing an “emancipation through practice” rather than through “theory,” and thus through “economic” rather than organized “political” struggle. Since “the world of labour [*monde ouvrier*] is generally ignorant,” and susceptible to “the political and religious prejudices through which the self-interested classes endeavour ... to obscure their consciousness,” the task of worker self-emancipation (for Bakunin) necessitated an absolute break from the bourgeois trappings of “the present political and social world.”¹³³ Indeed, he regarded the very notion that “political transformation must *precede* economic transformation” as one of the “political prejudices” through which “bourgeois socialists” effectively deferred or ameliorated the workers’ struggle against capitalist exploitation. As such, Bakunin understood the subordination of the political to the economic

¹³¹ Marx, “Provisional Rules”; 82.

¹³² Marx & Engels, “Resolution of the London Conference of working-class political action”; *ibid.*, 270.

¹³³ Bakunin, *Politique*, 8-9.

in an *absolute* sense; the purity of “economic emancipation” had to be maintained against the “partisans of *bourgeois politics*” within the workers’ movement.¹³⁴

However, their divergent interpretations of the First International’s “Rules” can be linked to a more subtle point of difference, relating to the institutional logic of the International itself. Clearly, the primary aim of the International was to unify the working class or proletariat as a political force: encouraging “small and disconnected local ... working men’s societies” to “combine ... into national bodies,” and then establishing “a central medium of communication and cooperation” between these bodies.¹³⁵

Marx’s rationale in this regard was perhaps most clearly expressed in an 1869 circular to the International (which opposed a grouping that Bakunin had attempted to establish):

Since the sections of the working class in various countries have reached different stages of development, it follows that their theoretical opinions, which reflect the real movement, will be equally divergent.

However, the community of action established by the International ... [and] the exchange of ideas fostered by [its] publicity ... cannot fail gradually to give rise to a common theoretical programme.¹³⁶

Of course, these “different stages of development” corresponded, for Marx, to the degree of industrial-capitalist development in each nation, from which proletarian consciousness would arise organically. Marx’s institutional logic thus entailed that, through common “action” and

¹³⁴ Ibid., 14-15.

¹³⁵ Marx, “Provisional Rules”; 83-84.

¹³⁶ Quoted in: Marx, “The Alleged Splits in the International [1872]”; *ibid.*, 280.

the international “exchange of ideas,” the “theoretical” class-consciousness of the proletariat could be produced *in advance* of its organic development in response to capitalism. The reason for the institution of the International was, in essence, to accelerate the emergence of proletarian class-consciousness by providing a common theoretical platform. In this framework, the fundamental principles of the International – worker self-emancipation and the priority of economic struggle – were intended to function as initial spurs for the active development or dissemination of Marxian theory and, accordingly, the development of proletarian class-consciousness.

The institutional rationale presented by Bakunin in his *Politics of the International* stood on quite different grounds – relating to *mass* consciousness rather than *class* consciousness. For Bakunin, the conflict between capital and labour was simply a matter of inequality between the “privileged” classes and the workers; capitalism was not rigorously defined as a specific historical epoch or mode of production. The task of the International was not to unify different levels of capitalist development under a general theory, but rather to overcome the uneven “industrial, political, intellectual, and moral development of the labouring masses [*masses ouvrières*] in different countries”¹³⁷ In particular, it was necessary to counter the “ignorance” and “prejudices of the popular masses,” which left them susceptible to bourgeois propaganda, and led them into political action “contrary to their interests.”¹³⁸ In this regard, the crux of the International’s value as an institution was its *apolitical* “association” of the workers: “the founders of the international Association have acted with very great wisdom in first of all eliminating from [its] programme ... all political questions ... [thus] detach[ing] the labouring masses from all bourgeois politics.”¹³⁹ Only by totally eschewing “political and philosophical principles,” rejecting “all known political systems” of the

¹³⁷ Bakunin, *Politique*, 4.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

“bourgeois world,” and instead basing the International upon “the exclusively economic struggle of labour against capital” could “the true politics of the workers” ultimately be realized.¹⁴⁰ In this framework, the fundamental principles of the International were significant precisely because of their apolitical or neutral quality, which freed the proletarian “masses” from the corruptions of bourgeois politics.

*

I will now consider how German orthodox Marxism and French revolutionary syndicalism sustained and developed the mass-organizational logic of Marxist and anarchist internationalism. Again, existing accounts tend to view internationalism as a “corollary” aspect of both doctrines. Undoubtedly, both were explicitly committed to internationalist principles, and participated in international organizations and projects. Since they both identified the driving force of the workers’ movement as a proletarian class struggle emanating directly from the social dynamics of capitalism, it naturally followed that proletarian identity would override the workers’ national differences. Thus, the “Erfurt Programme” stated that “[t]he interests of the working class are the same in all countries with the capitalist mode of production” and aligned itself with the “class-conscious workers of all other nations”;¹⁴¹ whilst, in 1905, the CGT secretary Victor Griffuelhes asserted that “the proletarian can have no nation [*patrie*],” since this was the sole concern of the “proprietors of [the] soil” who exploited the workers.¹⁴² But these principles were not integral to their programmatic visions of proletarian revolution: Marxist parliamentary struggle leading to a proletarian seizure of state power; syndicalist direct action leading to a revolutionary general strike. Furthermore, these conceptions were both

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 5.

¹⁴¹ [SPD, “Erfurter Programm.”]

¹⁴² [Victor Griffuelhes, contribution to “Enquête sur l’idée de Patrie et la classe ouvrière”]; *Le Mouvement socialiste* 160 (August 1905), 445-46.

essentially national – indeed, essentially “German” and “French” – rather than international in scope. In this framework, the principle of internationalism pertained only to a set of important but supplementary considerations: how a revolutionary transformation in Germany or France could subsequently be protected from foreign capitalist reaction, and how the national revolution might spark a series of imitative revolutions across Europe. (Of course, the general existential threat of a European war also prompted statements of proletarian internationalism – but this was again a secondary consideration, as neither doctrine viewed war as a necessary condition of revolutionary transformation.)

The historiography of worker internationalism during the Second International period has largely focused on its weaknesses – the inability of its internationalist principles to overcome national differences within the workers’ movement, and thus to translate from theory into practice. Often, these studies have specifically sought to explain the failure of the workers’ movement to resist the outbreak of the First World War, precipitating the collapse of the Second International, “when it became clear that the international solidarity of the proletariat ... was an empty phrase and could not stand the test of events.”¹⁴³ The antagonism between the French and German workers’ movements is usually viewed as the decisive faultline in this regard. Whether this antagonism was more significant at the level of international socialist congresses,¹⁴⁴ or in the patriotic attitudes of rank-and-file workers,¹⁴⁵ is not directly relevant to this study. However, two studies frame this subject in a manner relevant to the doctrinal content of German orthodox Marxism and French revolutionary syndicalism.

Milorad M Drachkovitch simply argues that the “profound ... incomprehensions” that undermined the “official unanimity” of the pre-war workers’ movement concerning the war derived from the difference between Germany and France at the level of “national life itself”:

¹⁴³ Kołakowski, *Main Currents* [vol. 2], 28.

¹⁴⁴ Georges Haupt, *Socialism and the Great War* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972).

¹⁴⁵ Jolyon Howorth, “French and German Workers: The impossibility of internationalism, 1900-1914”; *European History Quarterly* 15 (1984), 71-97.

“All the differences between the French and the Germans as peoples had forceful repercussions upon their socialisms ... : national temperament, historical development, political, economic, and social milieux, doctrinal sources.” The different “mental structures of the two peoples” explained “the radical allure and revolutionary verbalism of ... French syndicalism” on one hand, and “the moderation and profound reformism ... of German socialism” on the other. He furthermore cites the statements by Griffuelhes and Engels that explicitly recognized these differences.¹⁴⁶ More recently, Susan Milner has examined the CGT’s attempts to construct an alternative organization to the socialist Second International, and concluded that the internationalisms of German Marxism and French syndicalism were incompatible precisely because they were “corollary” to their primary, “domestic preoccupations and struggles”: on one hand, the Second International was dominated by the SPD’s efforts “to shape the international movement into the social democratic mould”; on the other, the CGT’s search for an alternative internationalist organization was an extension of its “struggle for syndicalist autonomy” from socialism, an ideological battle that “had already been won” in France.¹⁴⁷ Milner also suggests that this differentiation was exacerbated as “[t]he relationship between the French and German labour movements was conditioned by a set of reflexes, images and perceptions, which operated on a fundamental, psychological level.”¹⁴⁸

It should now be clear how my approach effectively reverses the interpretive parameters of these studies – not in order to construct a better explanation for the organizational failings of pre-war worker internationalism (for which Milner’s account is perfectly adequate), but rather to reinterpret German orthodox Marxism and French revolutionary syndicalism as doctrines for which the element of national specificity was neither a “mental structure” imposed upon them by “national life itself,” nor a set of reflexive “psychological” assumptions and

¹⁴⁶ Milorad M Drachkovitch, *Les socialismes français et allemand et le problème de la guerre, 1870-1914* (Geneva: Droz, 1953), 345-47.

¹⁴⁷ Susan Milner, *The Dilemmas of Internationalism* (Oxford: Berg, 1990), 230-31.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 236.

stereotypes, but an textual-political structure that played a constitutive role in their visions of “proletarian revolution.” In other words, these doctrines were not merely the product of German and French peculiarities superadded or imprinted onto the fundamental principles of Marxism and syndicalism; rather, it can be said that the very construction of “Marxism” and “syndicalism” as coherent doctrines during the Second International period rested upon ideological conceptualizations of “Germany” and “France” as sites of proletarian-revolutionary institutionality.

Following Marx and Bakunin, both doctrines sought to revive the spirit of the International – not just in the general sense of establishing international co-operation between the workers, but recreating it as an outstanding historical precedent of *proletarian-revolutionary institutionality*. In other words, the “proletarian internationalism” of the Second International era was not solely rooted in the theoretical principle that proletarian class-identity would override national interests. It also involved a particular logic of proletarian mass-organization, epitomized by the historic example of the First International.

In the “Erfurt Programme” and “Amiens Charter” themselves, the element of internationalism was not strongly emphasized. As already mentioned, the Erfurt Programme stated that workers’ interests were the same in all capitalist nations; however, it went no further than expressing solidarity with these workers, and did not commit to any specific internationalist programme. Two months before the Erfurt Congress, the Second International had met at Brussels, and saw conflicts between the Social Democrats and certain anarchistic elements that had yet to be officially excluded from proceedings. It was only at the 1893 Congress in Zürich that German orthodox Marxism began to exert its ideological dominance over the International, which passed an anti-anarchist resolution specifying that membership organizations must recognize the necessity of political action. The Amiens Charter did not refer explicitly to internationalism

at all. This can be placed in the context of the CGT's internationalist efforts at the time, as outlined in the report of its *Comité confédéral* to the Amiens Congress, which detailed an exchange of letters between Émile Pouget and Carl Legien, reformist leader of the German Free Unions and the trade-unionist International Secretariat. Requesting that the Secretariat should discuss the "general strike" at a forthcoming conference, Pouget argued that: "The autonomy of each [national] centre should be complete, and a secretariat that arrogates a controlling right to itself exceeds its [proper] functions."¹⁴⁹

These points would support Susan Milner's aforementioned argument that, in programmatic terms, German orthodox Marxism and French revolutionary syndicalism defined themselves primarily at the "domestic" level, and approached internationalism as a "corollary" domain through which their distinctive visions of proletarian revolution could be propagated. A more nuanced picture emerges, however, when we turn to the major theoretical expositions of the Erfurt and Amiens statements by their main authors: namely, Kautsky's 1892 commentary on *The Erfurt Programme*, and Pouget's pamphlets on *The Party of Labour* (1905). In these texts, both Kautsky and Pouget identified the First International as an institutional precursor to their respective programmes, and furthermore argued that the proletariat – in the specific guise of German Social Democracy or French syndicalism – was now ready to revive this institutional model in a more decisive or enduring fashion.

For Kautsky, the First International had essentially been a Marxist organization, and a direct continuation of the internationalism of Marx and Engels' 1848 *Communist Manifesto*. Accordingly, its political function had been "not only to awaken the feeling of international solidarity in the proletarians of different countries, but also to give them a common aim and thereby to lead them down a common path." It had succeeded in the former respect but not in the latter, which Kautsky attributed to the oppositional elements of "bourgeois, petit bourgeois,

¹⁴⁹ [CGT, Amiens Congress,] 7.

and primitive-proletarian utopianism” within the International, whose opposition to its Marxian “foundational principles [*Grundsätze*]” had increased as it became “clearer ... that their consequence was Social Democracy.” Thus, the First International had ultimately collapsed, although not without having “disseminated” a certain “consciousness of international solidarity” amongst the workers. This solidarity could now (in 1891) once again be channelled into an organizational form – but this time with the additional factor that, since the end of the First International, “the ideas of the *Communist Manifesto* have captured the militant [*kämpfende*] proletariat in the whole of Europe.” A “utopian” diversion of the movement away from the path of Social Democracy was no longer possible; the delegates of the new International were not “isolated ... thinkers and dreamers” of the bourgeoisie, but rather the “representatives and spokespeople of ... working men and women.” This was the significance of the “international standpoint” declared by “Social Democracy” in general and the Erfurt Programme in particular.¹⁵⁰

Conversely, Pouget’s *Party* linked revolutionary syndicalism to the “federalists” and “autonomists” within the First International – those who had opposed the “centralists” and “authoritarians” led by Marx. (Although the name of Bakunin was not explicitly mentioned, Pouget cited an 1871 circular published by the Bakuninist *Fédération jurassienne*.) For Pouget, it was the federalists who were “true to the spirit of the International” as a worker-led initiative that had, for the first time, given form to the proletariat’s instinctive and “embryonic ... aspirations” to associate on a class basis; the Marxians, on the other hand, had betrayed these “aspirations” in seeking to direct the International towards particular political aims. In this sense, the *parti du Travail* (by which Pouget did not mean a political party, but the specific model of syndicalist federation of which the CGT was the “organic expression” and exemplary case) was “in a direct line ... the historic prolongment” of the International. However, one

¹⁵⁰ Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm*, 244.

formal difference existed between the International and the *syndicats* – whereas the former was a “grouping by affinity” that had established an “entente” between “heterogeneous elements,” the *syndicat* was a pure “grouping by interests,” which would not be susceptible to the same factional divisions. Pouget attributed this difference to the historical “conditions in which the social struggle was engaged” during the time of the International, when the parameters of class struggle had not yet fully emerged.¹⁵¹ Since then, the syndicalist movement had “grown and ... acquired consciousness of its *raison d’être*,” allowing it to resist the political diversions to which the International had succumbed.¹⁵²

In summary, Erfurt Marxism and Amiens syndicalism were each represented by their main ideological architects as continuations of the “true” spirit of the First International, which they respectively identified with its Marxian-socialist and Bakuninist-federalist factions. Furthermore, both argued that proletarian consciousness had, since the collapse of the International, developed in a way that corresponded to this spirit, thereby removing the grounds upon which the “utopian” or “authoritarian” deviators of proletarian internationalism had formerly stood. Thus, in the guise of “Social Democracy” or “syndicalism,” the proletarian spirit of the International could now be revived in a more robust institutional form. A consequence of these arguments was that the key principles of the “Provisional Rules” – *worker self-emancipation* and the *subordination of politics to economics* – were converted into guidelines for their respective national institutions.

Worker self-emancipation

Both pre-war doctrines explicitly adhered to the First International’s principle of *worker self-emancipation*, but in suitably translated and adjusted forms: in short, defining self-

¹⁵¹ Pouget, “Le parti du travail”; 134-36.

¹⁵² Ibid., 140.

emancipation in terms of either *self-consciousness* or *self-sufficiency*. Orthodox Marxist theory equated the self-emancipation of the workers to the historic struggle of “the proletariat as a self-conscious class.”¹⁵³ In other words, the measure of workers’ self-determination was the degree to which they were conscious of the essential nature of their own historic struggle against the bourgeoisie. Furthermore, Kautsky’s *Erfurter* commentary held that this proletarian self-consciousness would inevitably spread across an ever-increasing proportion of the working classes, due to the proletarianizing tendencies of modern capitalism:

The working conditions of capitalist production shows the proletariat ... the necessity of strong togetherness, the subordination of the individual to the generality. ... [They] awaken a new call ... , every day growing in number, in unity, ... in self-consciousness and insight.¹⁵⁴

In the context of this economic-historical inevitability, worker self-emancipation did not entail an imperative political command, but rather a “scientific” precept from which political imperatives might derive. Accordingly, from the SPD Executive’s initial draft of the “Erfurter Programm” up to Kautsky’s final version, the principle of self-emancipation was couched in an exclusively declarative tone. The initial draft stated that: “The liberation of the working class can only be the work of the working class itself, because all other classes and parties stand upon the grounds of capitalism”;¹⁵⁵ the SPD’s representation of the working class was *assumed* rather than challenged by the principle of self-emancipation. This adjustment of the self-

¹⁵³ Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm*, 225.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 197-98.

¹⁵⁵ [SPD,] “Interner Entwurf des PV, 18. Juni 1891”; [“Anhang: Das Erfurter Programm – synoptische Darstellung der Entwürfe,”] Gilcher-Holtey, *Das Mandat des Intellektuellen*, 340.

emancipatory principle into orthodox Marxist discourse was further advanced in the final Programme:

... social transformation signifies the liberation not only of the proletariat, but of the whole human race that suffers under the present situation. But it can only be the work of the working class, because all other classes ... stand on the ground of private ownership of the means of production and have the preservation of the foundations of contemporary society as a common goal.¹⁵⁶

Thus, the founding text of orthodox Marxism strictly circumscribed the significance of the “self-emancipation” principle, binding it to the theoretical notion of proletarian “self-consciousness” under capitalism.

Conversely, revolutionary syndicalists invoked the principle of worker self-emancipation in a sense specifically linked to *self-sufficiency* rather than self-consciousness. Contributing to a 1904 inquiry on the “general strike,” CGT secretary Victor Griffuelhes described the tactic as “the application of the maxim of the International: the emancipation of workers will be the work of the workers themselves”; “it is the worker himself who accomplishes his endeavour for his own advantage.”¹⁵⁷ This was the essential significance of syndicalist “direct action”: “*Direct action* can be called action of the workers themselves By direct action, the worker himself creates his struggle; it is he who conducts it, determined not to rely upon anyone but himself.”¹⁵⁸ At Amiens, this self-sufficiency became equated with the organizational “autonomy” of the CGT from the French Socialists. Charles Dhooghe, a

¹⁵⁶ [SPD, “Erfurter Programm.”]

¹⁵⁷ Victor Griffuelhes, “La grève générale [1904]”; *L’action syndicaliste* (Paris: Rivière, 1908), 36.

¹⁵⁸ Griffuelhes, “Le syndicalisme [1904]”; *ibid.*, 23.

signatory of the “Amiens Charter,” was a member of the textile workers’ federation whose reformist leader Victor Renard submitted the motion advocating co-operation with the socialists; in the lead-up to the Amiens congress, Dhooghe addressed a circular to rank-and-file textile workers in the hope of turning them against the motion:

If you do not say that you are for the autonomy of *syndicats* and the independence of their action, it will be desperate. ... But you will say that “the emancipation of workers can only be the work of the workers themselves” and you will not be victims of the mirage of politics. ... You are not in the *syndicats* to discuss the question of whether the deputies of a given party are more likely than others to defend your interests. You do not want to leave the concern for this defence to anyone but yourself.¹⁵⁹

This conception of syndicalist autonomy as worker *self-sufficiency* was not merely occasioned by the Amiens debate, but reflected a broader development in revolutionary syndicalist discourse. In 1905, Hubert Lagardelle, editor of the syndicalist revue *Le Mouvement socialiste*, used the imperative principle of worker self-sufficiency to distinguish revolutionary partisans of “direct action” from the dead-end of parliamentary socialism:

Either the social revolution is the work of a political party ... an empty action if the working masses are not able to capture ... the organs of the state that must be destroyed. Or the social revolution is the work of the working masses themselves, arrived at a

¹⁵⁹ [CGT, Amiens Congress, 139.]

sufficient degree of organization, cohesion, and consciousness, and thus having no need of the mediation of any party external to them: the emancipation of the workers is the task of the workers themselves.¹⁶⁰

The principle of worker self-emancipation was thus invoked by the revolutionary syndicalists in direct opposition to the political representation of worker interests.

It is now clear how orthodox Marxism and revolutionary syndicalism could invoke the First International's principle of worker self-emancipation in fundamentally opposed senses. However, we should not hastily conclude that this shared point of reference held no common significance between the two doctrines. Moving beyond the level of explicitly stated principles, we find that both doctrines *incorporated* the opposing interpretation at a deeper theoretical level. Here I am not simply stating that orthodox Marxism developed a theory of worker "self-sufficiency" and that revolutionary syndicalism addressed the problem of worker "self-consciousness." These underlying aspects of each doctrine also led to explicit invocations of the International's self-emancipation principle.

On the Marxist side, this occurred in Engels' 1890 preface to a new edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, explaining why he and Marx "could not have called it a *Socialist Manifesto*" at the time:

By "socialists" in 1847 one meant ... the adherents of various utopian systems ... : people who stood outside the workers' movement ... That part of the workers, however, who, convinced

¹⁶⁰ Hubert Lagardelle, "Chronique politique et sociale: La grève générale et le socialisme"; *Le Mouvement socialiste* [MS] 145 (décembre 1904), 334.

of the inadequacy of mere political revolutions, demanded a thorough transformation of society ... was then called Communist. ... Socialism meant in 1847 a bourgeois movement, communism a working-class movement. ... And since we already were very definitely of the opinion that “the emancipation of the workers must be the work of the working class itself,” we could not for a moment be in doubt over which of the two names to choose.¹⁶¹

Crucially, this separation *preceded* the development of proletarian self-consciousness – Engels specified that the workers’ communism in question “was only an instinctive, somewhat raw Communism.”¹⁶² The very framing of this argument implied that the situation had changed by 1890, such the term “socialism” was no longer taboo; here the argument must be placed in the context of the “evolution of socialism from utopia to science.” Due to this development since 1847, socialism was no longer essentially “bourgeois,” and there could now be – as Kautsky’s “Erfurt” commentary would assert – a “unification of the militant proletariat with modern socialism.” However, this development was only meaningful or possible in light of the earlier separation, which had found expression in the “insight” of worker self-emancipation. In summary, the principle of worker self-emancipation as *self-sufficiency*, which Engels retrospectively claimed to have crystallized in the writing of the *Communist* (rather than *Socialist*) *Manifesto*, was a necessary pre-condition for the orthodox Marxist principle of worker self-emancipation as *self-consciousness*.

¹⁶¹ Friedrich Engels, “Vorwort zur vierten deutschen Ausgabe (1890) des ‘Manifests der Kommunistischen Partei’”; Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *Werke* XXII (Berlin: Dietz, 1963), 58.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 58.

On the syndicalist side, we have already seen the problem of “self-consciousness” arise within Lagardelle’s definition of “direct action” as the work of a labour movement that has already “arrived at a sufficient degree of organization, cohesion, and consciousness”; it is only after reaching this point that workers’ struggle “requires no intermediary” or “exterior party.” How could this preliminary “consciousness” be produced in a manner that would not compromise the organicism of syndicalist struggle? A certain form of “militant” writing, closely bound to working-class “action,” was exempted from the syndicalists’ radical critique of abstract representation. The militant standpoint here entailed the incorporation of an “intermediary” or “exterior” process of reflection and clarification *within* worker “activity” itself – in short, a form of *self-consciousness*, a clear conception of one’s own actions. Again, this would seem to represent a necessary pre-condition for the explicit syndicalist logic of self-emancipation as self-sufficiency. This preliminary significance of worker self-emancipation was explicitly linked to the International’s founding principle in Pouget’s 1910 pamphlet *Direct Action*:

Direct Action implies that the working class lays claim to the notions of freedom and autonomy

[It is] the realization of the principle of freedom within the working masses ... no longer in abstract formulae ... but in clear and practical notions, generative of combativity

This fundamental and complete rupture between capitalist society the workers’ world, which Direct Action synthesizes, was expressed by the International Workingmen’s Association in its

motto “the emancipation of the workers will be the work of the workers themselves.”¹⁶³

Before the revolutionary syndicalists could advocate the principle of syndicalist “autonomy,” the very concept itself had to be “reclaimed” from bourgeois-political abstraction and rendered “clear and practical” by the “combativity” of the workers’ struggle. In this framework, the International’s principle represented a decisive first step in the self-conscious clarification of “direct action.”

At an explicit level, the doctrines of orthodox Marxism and revolutionary syndicalism rested upon divergent interpretations of the principle of worker self-emancipation, essentially corresponding to the Marxian and anarchist standpoints that had polarized the First International. However, what distinguished the pre-war doctrines from their predecessors was their implicit *incorporation* of the opposing definition; both could, in this sense, claim to have overcome the potential for schismatic interpretation that had originally led to the International’s downfall. The basis of this implicit incorporation of the opposing standpoint can be connected to my wider argumentation regarding the common ground between the two doctrines.

In both cases, the opposing interpretation of worker self-emancipation was established as a *literary-political* pre-condition that allowed the explicit principle to function properly. In the case of orthodox Marxism, this argument arose as part of its framing of the *Communist Manifesto* as the founding work of modern proletarian socialist literature. In the case of revolutionary syndicalism, this occurred due to the reflexive problem confronted by a syndicalist literature that, in principle, rejected all abstract political conceptuality. For both, the First International’s principle of self-emancipation had given historic expression to these pre-conditions.

¹⁶³ Émile Pouget, “L’action directe”; 154. I have restored original capitalizations to this text.

Both of these pre-conditional arguments posited a certain originary division between the workers and the bourgeoisie, which strictly *preceded* the outright conflict between “proletariat” and “bourgeoisie” under capitalism. For Engels, this was the split between the “socialists” and “communists” in 1848, which he and Marx had recognized in naming the *Communist Manifesto* in accordance with the “insight” of worker self-emancipation; for Pouget, this was a “rupture ... between capitalist society and the labouring world,” which expressed itself at the level of the “clear and practical” notion(s) of self-emancipatory “direct action.” These divisions were “instinctive” or reflected an essential “spirit” of workers’ struggle. The fully-developed class conflict between proletariat and bourgeoisie only emerged in the wake of – and perhaps through critical-historiographical reflection upon – this originary split.

By synthesizing the logics of worker self-emancipation as *self-consciousness* and as *self-sufficiency*, both doctrines effectively conceptualized the relationship between *class-consciousness* and *mass-consciousness*. For orthodox Marxism, the preliminary principle of “communist” self-sufficiency crystallized an instinctive mass-consciousness of the workers; this was a pre-condition for the SPD’s “task” of establishing proletarian class-consciousness as a mode of self-consciousness. For revolutionary syndicalism, the preliminary arrival at a certain degree of conceptual self-consciousness involved an act of working-class “reclamation” by a class-conscious minority of militants; this was a pre-condition for the CGT’s task of establishing mass-consciousness on the basis of autonomous self-sufficiency.

The subordination of politics

We can now turn to the second founding principle of the First International: the subordination of the political to the economic within workers’ struggle. Again, the antithesis between orthodox Marxism and revolutionary syndicalism can be reframed in terms of divergent interpretations of the same principle. A key element of the Marxian-Bakunian split was whether

this subordination of the political was considered in a purely *instrumental* sense – emphasizing the qualification “as a means” – or in an *absolute* sense – supported by certain translations that elided this phrase. On one hand, Kautsky invoked the principle as stating: “that the political movement is solely a helpful means” to the “economic emancipation of the working classes”;¹⁶⁴ on the other, Pouget omitted “as a means” when citing the principle: “economic emancipation is the grand goal to which every political movement must be *subordinated*.”¹⁶⁵ These divergent interpretations of the subordination principle were elaborated into distinctive Marxist and syndicalist arguments regarding the essential nature of workers’ struggle against “economical subjection ... [that] lies at the bottom of servitude [and] all social misery.”¹⁶⁶

The “Erfurt Programme” asserted that: “The struggle of the working class against capitalist exploitation is necessarily a political struggle. The working class cannot lead its economic struggle ... without political rights.”¹⁶⁷ In his commentary, Kautsky elaborated this statement by specifying a number of basic “freedoms” upon which the “economic struggle” depended: “freedom of association, of assembly, and of the press.”¹⁶⁸ The “means” of political struggle was thus essential if the workers’ struggle was to develop a sufficient degree of organization for the achievement of its ultimate economic goals. At one level, this argument was grounded in a practical assessment of the limitations of pure trade-unionist struggle: on one hand, a tendency towards the formation of a labour aristocracy, dividing skilled and unskilled workers (a critique of organization split by *trade*, rather than representing the proletariat as a whole);¹⁶⁹ on the other, the strike-breaking technologies of modern capitalist society, which the workers could not confront by force alone.¹⁷⁰ However, a deeper ideological

¹⁶⁴ Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm*, 250.

¹⁶⁵ Pouget, “Le parti du Travail”; 135.

¹⁶⁶ Marx, “Provisional Rules”; 82.

¹⁶⁷ [SPD, “Erfurter Programm.”]

¹⁶⁸ Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm*, 218.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 214-15.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 218.

justification can also be identified, linked to the essential nature of working class existence – and, indeed, its “consciousness.”

In particular, the reference to “living conditions” grounded Kautsky’s argument in a broader motif of his text: namely, his conception of the cultural “elevation of the waged proletariat,” beginning from the abject situation of the “*Lumpenproletariat*” and rising to the point of political self-determination, which took the *lifeworld* of the urban industrial workforce into account as a potential impediment to its progress.¹⁷¹ At the root of this analysis was the problem of *time*:

Time to live, to learn, is not spared to the proletariat by capital if it does not have to Leaving a short break between work and sleep, then it is only enough for fleeting pleasures in order to deaden the consciousness of misery, the intoxication of alcohol or sexual intercourse.¹⁷²

Under the conditions of untrammelled industrial capitalism, the workers had no time for cultural self-improvement and thus remained mired in squalor; and without the means to develop their “consciousness,” they sought to “deaden” it. This was how Kautsky conceived “economical subjection” as the root of servitude and social misery. Nothing immanent to this situation lent itself to escape; thus, from the very outset, it was necessary for the “helpful means”

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 190. This element of Marxist theory can be traced back to Friedrich Engels’ *Die Lage der arbeitenden Klasse in England* (1845).

¹⁷² Ibid., 189. The transformative introduction of political “energy” into the *time-poor* existence of industrial workers can be linked to at least three – at times dissonant or contradictory – logical structures within Kautsky’s theory: firstly, the necessity of certain bourgeois-philanthropic reforms, especially the restriction of working hours, as a pre-condition for the emergence of the workers’ movement itself; secondly, the vision of a heroic proletariat rising from its slumber only once it had gained sufficient consciousness of its own situation and power under capitalism; thirdly, the notion of politics as a technology in the hands of the workers, allowing it to administrate its anti-capitalist struggle in a more rational and time-efficient manner.

of “political activity” to be introduced into the economic existence of the workers, in order for them to break from the self-perpetuating situation of “lumpen” passivity. The presence of political struggle “as a means” was *existentially* necessary to the workers’ struggle as such, and at no point in revolutionary practice could its importance be de-emphasized or disregarded. Consequently, its “subordination” to the economic was restricted to the domain of theoretical analysis: “The political struggle ... is in the final analysis ... the most comprehensive and usually most dramatic form of economic struggle.”¹⁷³ That is to say, the meaning of the political struggle could always be traced back, by the theorist or self-conscious proletarian, to an ultimate economic basis.

By contrast, revolutionary syndicalists viewed the subordination principle as a practical imperative to be positively enacted. Given the historic divisions and conflicts between “diverse political schools” within French socialism, the syndicalists could plausibly argue that workers’ struggle rooted in the “neutral field” of “economic terrain” might benefit from a “doctrinal sobriety” and “plasticity” of opinion, allowing it to avoid the paralyzing effects of “the opposition between schools” and “politicians’ rivalries,” and to establish “a living ‘unity’ that have futilely sought to create at a political level.”¹⁷⁴ It was along these lines that the “Amiens Charter” presented its rejection of political struggle as a pragmatic neutrality: “in order for syndicalism to reach its maximum effect ... the confederated organizations have not ... to be preoccupied with parties and sects.”¹⁷⁵ If this “official principle [of] political neutrality” seemed little more than a “pretext” for “outspoken” opposition to socialism, there was at least a logical progression from neutrality to “hostility.”¹⁷⁶ Sectional disagreements would inevitably occur within socialism because political concepts abstracted from the true economic interests of the working class; through their “abstract, vague, and nebulous formulae,” “the

¹⁷³ Ibid., 219.

¹⁷⁴ Émile Pouget, “Les débats du congrès [1904]”; *L’action directe*, 196.

¹⁷⁵ [“Charte d’Amiens.”]

¹⁷⁶ Ridley, *Revolutionary Syndicalism in France*, 88-89.

artificial combinations of democratism ... amalgamating individuals whose social interests are antagonistic.”¹⁷⁷

Once again, a deeper ideological grounding can be identified for this argument. In *Bases of Syndicalism*, Pouget depicted the political abstraction of worker interests as a “Machiavellian” strategy used by the bourgeoisie to retain its economic power:

[I]n society, there is nothing real except economic functions
Consequently, ... all political superfluity is a parasitic excrescence The bourgeoisie, with the intention of limiting the flourishing of economic sovereignty ... diverted the people towards the mirage of political sovereignty, whose impotent manifestations cannot hinder capitalist exploitation.¹⁷⁸

In place of the “rising proletariat” theme that underlay Kautsky’s Marxism, Pouget’s syndicalism was rooted in a narrative of continual bourgeois repression, beginning from the 1789 Revolution:

Throughout the nineteenth century, the proletariat made an effort to disengage its action from that of the purely political bourgeois parties. ... [T]he bourgeoisie, needing the consent or indifference of the proletariat to govern without encumbrance, has striven ... to soften it through a crafty education ... to divert it from the

¹⁷⁷ Émile Pouget, “L’action directe [1910]”; *L’action directe*, 154-56.

¹⁷⁸ Émile Pouget, “Les bases du syndicalisme [1903]”; *ibid.*, 74.

examination of economic questions, and to direct its activity towards the disappointing hopes of democratism. ...

The workers had not seen in the [1789] Revolution the dawn of economic liberation. ... The bourgeoisie was quick to show them that the Revolution was only *political* and not *economic*. It passed repressive laws and, as the workers lacked consciousness and experience ... it was not difficult for [the bourgeoisie] to stop this movement.¹⁷⁹

For Kautsky, worker consciousness was “deadened” by economic subjection, and required the time gained by political struggle in order to develop. Pouget viewed the problem differently. The development of working-class consciousness was irrepressible at an economic level, for this equated to social “reality.” However, at an early stage in its development, whilst the workers had still “lacked consciousness and experience,” the bourgeoisie had been able to deviate the workers’ struggle towards political goals, thus manufacturing their “consent or indifference” with regard to economic sovereignty. The essence of “economical subjection” was not capitalist impoverishment but bourgeois parasitism: “It is monstrous that individuals ... can consume without producing ... [and] that the real producers are severed from the possibility of consuming.”¹⁸⁰ And the necessary counterpart to the bourgeois “parasite” was an idealized worker as “producer”:

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 56-59.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 70. It is clear how the bourgeois could be portrayed as a parasite upon working-class labour; however, the crux of Pouget’s syndicalist ideology was perhaps a radical extension of this idea into the realm of *representation*. Political abstraction was criticized not only because it *served* the parasitical ends of the bourgeoisie; in a certain sense, the political “superfluity” or “excrescence” was a parasitical figure in itself – prompting a kind of consumption without production at the level of “real” meaning. This logic can perhaps be traced back to Fernand Pelloutier’s extraordinary reflections upon the problem of money: “*La cause de [l’anarchie bourgeoise], c’est l’existence d’une valeur d’échange, c’est-à-dire d’un signe ... chargé de représenter une valeur soi-disant correspondante de produits. ... C’est là l’origine du système social moderne tout entier*”

The producer is the basis of everything, it fulfills the essential organic function, by virtue of which society perpetuates itself. It is thus the initial cell of economic life, and it is its contact and accord with other producers whose action takes place on the same plane – that is to say, the same industry, same *métier*, similar endeavour – that will reveal the bond of solidarity whose network extends across the human collectivity.¹⁸¹

Thus, for Pouget, “economic life” signified not the urban-industrial lifeworld but the *pure process of social production*. All servitude and social misery stemmed from the *disruption* of this process in its proper functioning and the bourgeois-political obfuscation of workers’ true economic aspirations. It was therefore a *return* to economic existence (rather than the introduction of political technology) that would revive and develop worker class-consciousness, by virtue of the fundamental capacity for *association* between producers of an analogous type. In Pouget’s revolutionary syndicalist logic, the subordination of the political to the economic entailed a reassertion of productive social “reality” and the essential “bond of solidarity” at the root of human “sociability,” which the parasitic individualism of the bourgeoisie had (temporarily, for a century) disrupted and repressed.

Again, we can see how orthodox Marxism and revolutionary syndicalism developed divergent interpretations of the same First International principle. These interpretations can be linked to detailed theorizations of the “proletarian” workforce as a *sociohistorical* entity, within which a certain antagonism between the “political” and the “economic” took effect at a

(Fernand Pelloutier, “Du rôle des Bourses du travail dans la société future [1896]; Julliard, *Fernand Pelloutier*, 408-09).

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 70-71.

fundamental level of individual experience or group dynamics. In other words, the subordination of politics to economics was justified and interpreted according to how each doctrine conceived the emergence of “proletarian” struggle from working-class life.

II

The formation of German orthodox Marxism

In this chapter, I will examine the *formation* of “German orthodox Marxism” – a process that culminated in the SPD’s adoption of Marxist principles in its 1891 “Erfurt Programme.” This political-historical development is generally linked to the concept of “scientific socialism,” which is usually characterized as an “evolutionist, determinist, and scientific form of Marxism.”¹⁸² In other words, Marx’s theory of social development was conceived as an objective “science,” akin to Darwinian evolution. This implies two key stages in the formation of German orthodox Marxism: firstly, the *theoretical reconstruction* of Marxist theory into “scientific socialism”; secondly, the *practical application* of “scientific socialism” to the programmatic requirements of the SPD. In most existing accounts, the key figures in this process were Friedrich Engels and Karl Kautsky. On one hand, the orthodox reconstruction of Marxist theory is primarily attributed to Engels, who – most notably, in his pamphlet *The Evolution of Socialism from Utopia to Science* (1880) – argued that Marx’s dialectical-materialist view of history had provided socialism with a “scientific” grounding. On the other, the programmatic application of orthodox Marxism is usually attributed to Kautsky, Engels’ *protégé* and the main architect of the “Erfurt Programme,” which is often interpreted as a text that invoked the scientific “necessity” of proletarian revolution in order to legitimize the political activity of the SPD. A typical overview of “scientific socialism” and its political function is thus provided by Stephen Bronner. At an ideological level, “[f]ollowing the Engels of the ... [*Dialectic*] of Nature [an unpublished manuscript written between 1873 and 1883, applying dialectical logic to the natural sciences], Kautsky ... insisted that a Marxist inquiry had to depend on the truth-criteria of the natural sciences such as the validity of universal

¹⁸² Kołakowski, *Main Currents* [vol. 2], 32.

laws.”¹⁸³ Consequently, at an institutional level, Kautsky “*presupposed* the oppositional [i.e. revolutionary] character of the SPD ... [and] a type of faith manifested itself regarding the SPD’s role ... because [he] mechanistically identified class consciousness with the organization of that class.”¹⁸⁴

The following analysis will reconceptualize the formation of “Erfurt” doctrine in two ways. Firstly, it will reinterpret the theoretical significance of “scientific socialism.” A starting point for this argument will be the concept of “nature.” Existing interpretations have generally viewed the *analogy between Marxist theory and natural science* as the crux of “scientific socialism” – specifically, the implication that Marx’s laws of social development were equivalent, in their objective validity and certitude, to the organic laws of natural development. This analogy seemed to underlie both Engels’ theoretical reconstruction and Kautsky’s programmatic application of Marxism. For Engels, the same dialectical laws that Marx had applied to the development of capitalist society were equally valid across the domains of natural and even mathematical science; Engels’ manuscript *Dialectic of Nature* was an attempt to demonstrate this fact. In Kautsky’s case, both the “Erfurt Programme” and his longer theoretical works made frequent use of the term “natural necessity” (*Naturnotwendigkeit*), which most interpreters have viewed as an invocation of deterministic inevitability – in other words, the ultimate “guarantee of history” – that he used to legitimize his political standpoint. However, it can be shown that the concept of “nature” held a more specific ideological significance for orthodox Marxism, relating to the notion – initially expressed by Marx – that bourgeois political discourse involved a certain ideological concealment of “nature.” The “natural necessity” of orthodox Marxism was thus not merely a claim of historical inevitability; it was also a kind of conceptual weapon against the illusions of bourgeois ideology.

¹⁸³ Stephen Eric Bronner, “Karl Kautsky and the Twilight of Orthodoxy”; *Political Theory* 10.4 (November 1982), 580-81.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 597.

This reinterpretation of the orthodox Marxist conception of “nature” implies a further reinterpretation of “scientific socialism” in general. Whereas the existing historiography has generally framed “scientific socialism” as an assertion of the objective truth-value of Marxism, my account will suggest that it should also be viewed as a positive conception of proletarian-revolutionary action. In other words, the orthodox Marxists did not simply assert the “scientific” objectivity of their own theoretical standpoint; they also envisaged the proletariat’s revolutionary application of “science” as a necessary condition of social transformation. Here it is necessary to conceive “science” not merely as a canon of objective knowledge or an empirical mode of inquiry, but also as a kind of *sociopolitical institution* – a set of practices embedded within modern society, and ultimately rooted in Enlightenment values. Crucially, the institutionality of German Social Democracy could be conceived as “scientific” in this sense – due to its intellectual culture, its literary traditions, and so forth. It will thus be seen how, within the writings of German orthodox Marxism, “scientific socialism” was linked to a *revolutionary acceleration of Enlightenment progress*, whose theoretical premises were not strictly dependent upon the objective truth-value of natural science. Here the parameters of my argument must be specified. I am not denying that the orthodox Marxist concept of “scientific socialism” often carried a deterministic significance, rooted in the analogy between Marxism and natural science (and Darwinian evolution in particular). My point is that this explicit signification should not be viewed in isolation, or regarded as the “essential” meaning of the term. Rather, it constituted one aspect of a complex discursive structure, within which Marxist “science” also carried certain sociopolitical connotations linked to “Enlightenment.”

More specifically, I would argue that what I have called the *deterministic* and *sociopolitical* significations of “scientific socialism” can be respectively identified with the *primary doctrine* and *metadoctrine* of German orthodox Marxism. At the level of the primary doctrine – by which I refer to the explicit, orthodox Marxist vision of proletarian revolution –

“scientific socialism” indeed functioned as an assertion of objective validity. The theoretical assumptions of orthodox Marxism – such as the steady growth of proletarian consciousness under capitalism – were framed as scientific precepts. However, at a metadoctrinal level – that is, the invention of “Marxism” as a new genre of revolutionary doctrine – “scientific socialism” instead functioned primarily as an institutional ideal linked to Enlightenment progress. By arguing that German Social Democracy fulfilled this ideal, its “Marxist” doctrine could be justified in sociopolitical terms – for instance, as a product of Germany’s intellectual advancement. The deterministic logic of capitalist development, with which the doctrine of “German orthodox Marxism” is usually identified, was supplemented by a logic of radical Enlightenment. To fully comprehend the formation of German orthodox Marxism, it is necessary to recognize how these two logics interacted and cohered with each other.

As such, this reinterpretation of “scientific socialism” will go hand-in-hand with a second aspect of my reframing of German orthodox Marxism. In my account, the SPD’s “institutionalization” of Marxist theory will be conceived not as the practical instrumentation of an already-constituted theoretical structure, but rather in terms of a more complex and fluid *textual synthesis* between the ideology of “Marxism” and the institutionality of “German Social Democracy.” The implications of this argument can be clarified with reference to Engels and Kautsky’s roles in the formation of Erfurt doctrine. Although obviously connected by Engels’ mentoring of Kautsky and the shared concept of “scientific socialism,” their respective contributions to German orthodox Marxism have generally been regarded as qualitatively distinct. On one hand, Engels’ “scientific” reconstruction of Marxism has been viewed as an essentially theoretical development tied to his personal intellectual interests, and whose ultimate horizons were perhaps best represented by the *Dialectic of Nature*. On the other, Kautsky’s programmatic writing has been viewed as an practical application of the deterministic qualities of “scientific socialism” towards the political requirements of the SPD

– in particular, the party’s need to justify the strategy of parliamentary struggle. From this perspective, the SPD’s “institutionalization” of Marxism was rooted in a set of contingent political-historical circumstances, under which the deterministic form of Marxist theory (as constituted by Engels) became applicable to certain practical, party-political requirements (through Kautsky’s writings).

However, I would argue that this absolute separation between the “theoretical” development and “practical” application of German orthodox Marxism provides an incomplete picture of the doctrinal relationship between “Marxism” and “German Social Democracy.” My reading of “scientific socialism” suggests that Marxist “science” carried an inherent element of “institutional” significance; conversely, the world-leading status and historical mythology of the SPD lent it a certain “ideological” value in itself. The formation of Erfurt doctrine can thus be framed as the cross-contamination, convergence, and ultimate synthesis of Marxist ideology and Social Democratic institutionality, rather than a blunt instrumentation of the former by the latter. From this perspective, the contributions of Engels and Kautsky to this process did not belong to separate domains of doctrinal activity, but formed part of the same textual continuum, whose broad trajectory I will now attempt to sketch out. This narrative will begin from the unification of the German socialist movement at the 1875 Gotha Congress, which gave birth not only to “German Social Democracy” as a concrete historical phenomenon, but also to “Marxism” as a party-programmatic discourse. A final remark is necessary before beginning this analysis. A clear distinction must be drawn between the orthodox Marxists’ own usage of “scientific socialism,” and its subsequent application as a historical label *for* orthodox Marxism. This distinction that has not always been rigorously maintained. The key point in this regard is that the orthodox Marxists did not regard “scientific socialism” as a specific variety of Marxism, but rather as the essential destination of modern socialism once armed with Marx’s theoretical discoveries. The notion of distinct currents within Marxist theory was not yet meaningful to

the German orthodox Marxists – indeed, one might argue that this conception of Marxism as a differentiated field of interpretations had its historical origins in the subsequent “decomposition” of Erfurt Marxism.

*

The SPD was founded – as the *Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* (SAPD) – in May 1875, when the “Gotha Programme” established the unification of two existing organizations: the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein*, founded by Ferdinand Lassalle and still under the influence of his ideas despite his death in 1864, and the *Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands*, led by Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel, with whom Marx and Engels maintained a close correspondence from London. (The latter faction was also known as the “Eisenacher” party, after the city of Eisenach in which it was founded.) Marx found the terms of the “Gotha” compromise unsatisfactory and, soon after the unity congress, sent the Eisenacher leaders a lengthy critique of what he saw as the damaging Lassallean elements of the new programme. This “Critique of the Gotha Programme” can be seen as the inaugural text of German orthodox Marxism, as it explicitly defined the relationship between Marxian ideology and the institution of a (unified) German workers’ party for the first time. Crucially, Marx did not simply state a series of theoretical objections to the principles of “Gotha”; his critique also established some key parameters for the *party-programmatic application of Marxist theory*.

Marx’s criticisms of the “Gotha Programme” were mainly directed towards the Lassallean vision of social transformation through the “creation of co-operative societies with state help,” which entailed first agitating for a democratic “free state” from which co-operative measures could then be demanded; for Marx, this marked a regression from the proper

“standpoint of the class-movement.”¹⁸⁵ In economic terms, the co-operatives represented an “outdated” and insufficient socialist tactic, which did not overcome the root problem of capitalist production – the alienating effects of the commodification of labour.¹⁸⁶ In political terms, the Lassallean standpoint made the error of “treat[ing] the state as an independent entity” rather than an expression of the “existing society,” which meant that the contemporary state was necessarily an instrument of “bourgeois” rule and could only be altered by transforming society.¹⁸⁷ Under the influence of Marx’s “Critique,” the “Erfurt Programme” redressed these issues – on one hand, by identifying the ultimate aim of workers’ struggle as “the conversion of capitalist private ownership of the means of production ... into social ownership”; on the other, by linking to role of the SPD to guiding the “social transformation” rather than attempting to reform the state directly.¹⁸⁸

Beyond stating these principled objections, however, Marx’s “Critique” also established some key parameters for the party-programmatic application of Marxism. Two points can be noted in this regard. Firstly, Marx argued that the mistake of the Eisenacher leaders had been to draw up a “programme of principles” immediately, without having first “prepared” the ground through a period of “common action”; the initial programme should have been restricted to an “agreement for actions against the common enemy,” from which principled accord would follow.¹⁸⁹ This reflected the approach that Marx himself had taken when composing the “Provisional Rules” of the International Workingmen’s Association in 1864. As Engels recalled in 1890: “For the ultimate triumph” of his principles, “Marx relied solely ... upon the intellectual evolution of the working class, as necessarily had to arise from

¹⁸⁵ Karl Marx, “Kritik der Gothaer Programms [1875]”; Marx/Engels, *Werke* XIX (Berlin: Dietz, 1962), 27.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁸⁸ [SPD, “Erfurter Programm.”]

¹⁸⁹ Marx, “Kritik”; 13-14.

united action and discussion.”¹⁹⁰ In short, the validity of Marxist principles would be proven through the practical experience of proletarian struggle, leading organically to their programmatic adoption. Kautsky later presented his draft of the “Erfurt Programme” in precisely these terms. He argued that the party had, since Gotha, undergone the necessary practical preparation for adopting a “programme of principles”: “our party has been learning assiduously ... in the midst of the most heated *melée* of struggle”; in particular, it was the party’s common “struggle against the police” that had led to its greater “clarity and unity” of thought, and which underlay the “demand for the creation of a new programme” rooted in the principles of “scientific socialism.”¹⁹¹

Secondly, Marx’s criticisms of the opening sentence of the “Gotha Programme” held a special significance, as they implied that the “socialist programme” *as a political form* had a particular propagandistic role in the context of proletarian struggle. The sentence in question had stated that “labour is the source of all wealth and culture,” to which “all members of society” had “equal rights.” For Marx, these were essentially “bourgeois sayings [*Redensarten*]” – not only in principle, but also in terms of their ideological (or even rhetorical) effect. Above all, he insisted that “nature” rather than “labour” was the ultimate source of wealth; labour itself was the “expression of a natural power,” and only productive of wealth once man had mastered nature and become its “proprietor.” Concealing this “nature-conditionality [*Naturbedingtheit*]” of labour was ideologically beneficial to the bourgeoisie, because it masked how their ownership of natural resources and means of production allowed them to appropriate value from proletarians selling their labour. This provides a new perspective on the central significance of “nature” in the writings of Engels and Kautsky, which is usually linked to their deterministic view of social development as akin to a natural process such as Darwinian

¹⁹⁰ Friedrich Engels, “Vorwort zur vierten deutschen Ausgabe (1890) des ‘Manifests der Kommunistischen Partei’”; Marx/Engels, *Werke* 22, 57.

¹⁹¹ Kautsky, “Entwurf [1/4]”; 724.

evolution. We now see that “nature” also carried an ideological significance as a kind of antidote to bourgeois ideology, which rested upon a certain elision of nature as the condition of social production. The opening sentence of the “Erfurt Programme,” which stated that the “economic development of bourgeois society leads with natural necessity to the decline of small businesses,” must be viewed in this light, and not simply as an assertion of inevitability. Even a text such as Engels’ sketch of the development of ape into man (published in *Neue Zeit* in 1896), an extract from *Dialectic of Nature* that would seem to epitomize the attempt to merge Marxist social theory with Darwinian natural science, can be linked to the ideological field of Marx’s “Critique.” This can be seen from its opening sentences: “Labour is the source of all wealth, say the political economists. It is this – next to nature, which provides its material.”¹⁹²

The formula of “equal rights” to the “proceeds of labour” was also useful for bourgeois defenders of the established state of society, since it implied the need for a “government” to “uphold the social order” that maintained legal “rights,” as well as some form of “private property” through which the “proceeds of labour” would be distributed. Overall, what the opening sentence of the “Gotha Programme” had effectively hidden from view, through its “general platitudes [*Redensarten*] regarding ‘labour’ and ‘society’,” was the exploitation of labour-force through society itself or, more precisely, the appropriation of labour-value by the ruling class of society: “To the degree that labour develops socially and thereby becomes the source of wealth and culture, [so] poverty and destitution develops on the side of the workers, [and] wealth and culture on the side of non-workers.” However, the consequent task of the party programme was not simply to expose this exploitative “law of all precedent history”; it was also “to demonstrate positively how in the present capitalist society, the material etc. conditions are finally created, which enable and compel the worker to break this historical

¹⁹² Friedrich Engels, “Der Antheil der Arbeit an der Menschwerdung des Affen”; *NZ* XIV.ii (1896), 546.

curse.”¹⁹³ It was not only to reveal the social exploitation that bourgeois ideology concealed, but also to produce a kind of moral effect upon the workers’ struggle, against the “demoralizing” effect of “bourgeois phrasings.” Beyond the mere exposition of Marx’s theoretical principles, the “Marxist” party programme had a special propagandistic task – to imbue the workers with confidence that they were equipped to break from the “all precedent history.” In this light, the “natural necessity” of the “Erfurt Programme” is perhaps best understood as a party-programmatic slogan intended to counteract the demoralizing “bourgeois” phraseology of the “Gotha Programme,” rather than as an outright expression of objective certainty in the development of society.

Although written in 1875, Marx’s “Critique” was not published until early 1891, when Engels controversially arranged for the text to be reproduced in *Neue Zeit*, seeking to influence the drafting of the “Erfurt Programme.” For this reason, the first published text generally credited for propagating the standpoint of German orthodox Marxism was Engels’ *Evolution of Socialism from Utopia to Science*, which adapted three chapters from his earlier *Anti-Dühring* (1878). *Anti-Dühring* was a lengthy polemic against the academic socialist Eugen Dühring, a critic of Marx whose ideas had begun to find favour in Social Democratic circles. It subsequently obtained a doctrinal significance beyond its immediate subject; in the preface to an 1885 edition of the text, Engels noted that although its central argument was no longer relevant (since Dühring’s popularity had waned), the text was still useful as a “representation ... of the dialectical method and communist worldview” of Marx.¹⁹⁴ The *Evolution* pamphlet then extracted the most relevant sections of *Anti-Dühring* in this regard, and shaped them into a self-contained argument. It argued that the “utopian” socialists of the

¹⁹³ Marx, “Kritik”; 15-17.

¹⁹⁴ Friedrich Engels, “Herrn Eugen Dühring’s Umwälzung der Wissenschaft [Anti-Dühring]”; Marx/Engels, *Werke* 20 (Berlin: Dietz, 1962), 5.

past had been hampered by both the immaturity of the proletarian class struggle and the pre-dialectical philosophical mindset of bourgeois rationalism.¹⁹⁵ Through his two “great discoveries,” the dialectical-materialist “conception of history” and the exploitative role of “surplus value” in “capitalist production,” Marx had succeeded in overcoming these limitations: “[w]ith him, socialism became a science.”¹⁹⁶ Engels then outlined Marx’s analysis of capitalist production, and concluded by defining the “proletarian revolution” – in terms that would clearly influence the “Erfurt Programme” – as a conversion of the “social means of production into public property,” a “world-liberating achievement” whose activation in the “consciousness” of workers would depend upon the “theoretical expression of the proletarian movement, scientific socialism.”¹⁹⁷

Anti-Dühring and *Evolution* gained a much wider circulation than most of Marx’s own writings, and are thus often regarded as the main vehicles through which “Marxist” doctrine was popularized in Germany. The existing scholarship has generally focused on how these writings were responsible for the ideological reconstruction of Marxist theory into “scientific socialism.” For Paul Thomas, their defining feature was the “extraction ... of a scientific historical materialism” from Marx’s theories, seeking to imbue the Marxist “laws of capitalist development” with objective “certitude and universality” akin to natural science.¹⁹⁸ However, the institutional setting of these texts should not be overlooked. *Anti-Dühring* initially appeared as a series of articles in the SAPD organ *Volksstaat*, and the German edition of *Evolution* was explicitly produced for the purposes of “popular propaganda [*Volkspropaganda*],” responding to a “demand for new propaganda brochures” from the party.¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, in opposing Marx to Dühring, Engels was attempting to counteract a specific, intellectual danger confronted by

¹⁹⁵ Engels, “Entwicklung”; 190-93.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 228.

¹⁹⁸ Paul Thomas, “Engels and ‘Scientific Socialism’”; Manfred B Steger & Terrell Carver (eds.), *Engels after Marx*, (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 220-21.

¹⁹⁹ Engels, “Entwicklung”; 186.

German Social Democracy – a tendency towards “system-creating ... pseudoscience” in contemporary German thought. Dühring typified this tendency in claiming to establish a universal “system” of knowledge across an encyclopaedic range of topics. Engels saw this as a particular risk during the “initial conversion of scholars to Social Democracy,” but believed that direct contact with the “healthy nature of our workers” would resolve the problem.²⁰⁰ The fact that his representation of the Marxist “worldview” arose as a kind of by-product of this critique is by no means insignificant. It must therefore be recognized that Engels’ “materialist” standpoint – “the ultimate causes of all social transformations and political revolutions ... are to be sought not in the *philosophy* but rather in the *economics* of the relevant epoch” – held a constitutive party-political significance, as a necessary intellectual induction for bourgeois “scholars” entering the workers’ movement.²⁰¹

Engels’ argument against Dühring entailed a critique of the philosophical “system” as such. For Engels, to provide a “scientific representation [*Darstellung*]” of the “systematic interconnection” between all natural phenomena, or in other words to form “an exact mental image of the world system” as Dühring claimed to do, was “for us as well as for all times [*alle Zeiten*] an impossibility”:

Were at any point in time [*Zeitpunkt*] such a final, conclusive system of the world’s interconnections ... brought to completion, so would the realm of human knowledge become closed, and future historical advancement [*Fortentwicklung*] would be cut short from the moment when society was arranged in accordance with that system – which is an absurdity, a true nonsense.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Engels, “Anti-Dühring”; 6-7.

²⁰¹ Engels, “Entwicklung”; 210.

²⁰² Engels, “Anti-Dühring”; 34-35.

The philosophical “system” therefore implied that, at an ultimate point of history, the formal conditions of Enlightenment metaphysics, with its fixed concepts and principles, would become reality; in other words, the “system” formally presages the eternity of bourgeois idealism. Other “systems” to feature in Engels’ analysis were the “new social systems” of the utopian socialists,²⁰³ and the “Hegelian system,” which was thus rendered internally contradictory by its idealist essentialism.²⁰⁴ The dialectical materialist viewpoint was opposed in principle to any such closure, since it conceived all processes – including its own knowledge – in terms of continual flux and transformation.

In its 1885 preface to *Anti-Dühring*, Engels attempted to explain why this work had attained its unforeseen significance as a Marxist primer. Because the philosophical “‘system’ of Herr Dühring” was, or claimed to be, encyclopaedic in its scope, Engels’ critique had been “compelled to follow him everywhere”; and in repeatedly setting Marx’s views against those of Dühring, across this comprehensive range of subjects, “the negative critique thus became positive; the polemic gave way to a more or less coherent representation [*Darstellung*] of ... the dialectical method and communist worldview.”²⁰⁵ This notion of “negative critique” turning into a form of “positive” and “coherent” representation had an identifiable influence upon later orthodox Marxist writing. For example, it was reproduced in the conclusion of Kautsky’s *Karl Marx’s Economic Teachings* (1887), which described how Marx’s negative critique of bourgeois political economy had laid the positive foundations for “a new epoch for mankind.”²⁰⁶

Engels summarized the guiding premises of his “dialectical” standpoint as follows:

²⁰³ Engels, “Entwicklung”; 194.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 206.

²⁰⁵ Engels, “Anti-Dühring”; 8.

²⁰⁶ Karl Kautsky, *Karl Marx’ Ökonomische Lehren, gemeinverständlich dargestellt und erläutert* (Stuttgart: Dietz, 1912), 267.

... that in nature the same dialectical laws of motion ... assert themselves as those which govern the apparent contingency of events in history; the same laws that also form the thread running through the evolutionary history [*Entwicklungsgeschichte*] of human thought.²⁰⁷

The first premise, concerning the parallel between dialectical laws in nature and history, has been emphasized in most historiographical accounts of Engels' "scientific" recapitulation of Marxism. For example, Paul Thomas states that by positing a "unitary set of dialectical laws," "Engels claimed ... that Marx's method produced a law of historical development of the kind that invited comparison with Darwinian biology."²⁰⁸ Most notoriously, Engels identified two general laws governing dialectical transformations of one phenomenon into another: firstly, the dialectical relationship between quantity and quality, whereby quantitative changes become qualitative differences once they reach a certain point; secondly, the "negation of the negation," whereby a double negation (in effect, a synthesis of antagonistic tendencies) produces a higher-power version of the original entity. Engels then illustrated the applicability of these laws to physical, chemical, biological, mathematical, and social phenomena alike. By this reading, Engels used the fundamental scientific validity of the dialectic to assert the universal and objective truth-value of Marx's vision of historical development.

However, the significance of the second premise – that dialectical laws determine the development of thought itself – has perhaps been underestimated. If dialectical principles

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 11.

²⁰⁸ Thomas, "Engels and 'Scientific Socialism'"; 220. See also: Jack Mendelson, "On Engels' Metaphysical Dialectics: A foundation of orthodox 'Marxism'"; *Dialectical Anthropology* 4.1 (March 1979), 67; Richard Weikart, *Socialist Darwinism: Evolution in German socialist thought from Marx to Bernstein* (Bethesda, MD: International Scholars, 1999), 58-64.

governed the “evolutionary history of human thought,” then they also had to apply to the “evolutionary history of socialism” (which was exactly how Engels characterized *Evolution*),²⁰⁹ and therefore to the development of “scientific socialism” itself. As will be seen, the emergence of Marx’s “dialectical method” was itself represented as the product of dialectical transformations in the domain of ideas; in short, dialectics emerged dialectically. It could be argued that dialectical thought was thus endowed with a certain self-consciousness of its historical conditions, which both distinguished it from universalist bourgeois rationality and identified it with the proletarian condition. This aspect of Engels’ “dialectics” did not imply the universal validity of “scientific socialism,” but a kind of formal autoreferentiality that distinguished Marxism as a “proletarian” mode of thought. Furthermore, it was this side of his argument that in fact took centre stage in the three chapters of *Anti-Dühring* that were adapted into *Evolution*.

The opening paragraph of *Evolution* summarized how the *content* and *form* of “modern socialism” were each the product of distinct historical factors. Whereas its theoretical “content” reflected the “material economic facts” of economic “class relations” and “production” in “contemporary society,” its theoretical “form” was determined by the surrounding resources of “extant intellectual material [*vorgefundne Gedankenmaterial*]” or, in other words, the prevailing philosophical-historical conditions.²¹⁰ In principle, the aspect of “content” should have provided a sufficient basis for theorizing the development of “scientific socialism”: the maturation and clarification of objective capitalist conditions would bring them to the attention of ever-widening sections of the proletarian movement. Indeed, the deterministic logic of German orthodox Marxism is often identified with this conviction. However, Engels’ analysis

²⁰⁹ Friedrich Engels, “Die Entwicklung des Sozialismus von der Utopie zur Wissenschaft”; Marx/Engels, *Werke* XIX (Berlin: Dietz, 1962), 187.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 189.

of the socialist passage from “utopia to science” seemed to place greater emphasis on the formal, philosophical-historical conditions of socialist thought. It might be argued that the brief popularity of Dühring suggested the existence of a concrete problem of “form” at the ideological level of socialist struggle – that is, it was possible for the socialist movement to be diverted from objective facts by the illusory universality of a philosophical system. As already mentioned, this was a specifically party-political problem, related to the influx of intellectuals into the SAPD.

The first chapter of *Evolution* examined the major “utopian” socialists of the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries in this light: Henri de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, and Robert Owen. The “content” of their theories was linked to the immature state of capitalist class relations, which prevented them from grasping the full reality of class struggle.²¹¹ At the level of “form,” however, their work was shaped by the philosophy of the “French Enlightenment,” which was closely identified with the politics of the 1789 Revolution due to its critique of religious, social, and political “authority” in the name of “eternal truth, eternal reason, equality grounded in nature, and inalienable human rights.”²¹² Engels bluntly characterized this mode of thought as the “idealistic realm of the bourgeoisie,” which went hand in hand with “bourgeois property” and the “bourgeois, democratic republic.”²¹³ Although the utopian socialists were dissatisfied with the prevailing state of society, they remained within the bourgeois rationalist mindset: “Socialism is for them ... the expression of absolute truth, reason, and right, and needs only to be discovered to conquer the world with its innate power.”²¹⁴

Engels’ argument can thus be viewed as an extension of the “literary” logic developed in the *Communist Manifesto*. The *Manifesto* had already argued that these utopian thinkers were limited by the immature state of proletarian class struggle when they were writing.

²¹¹ Ibid., 193.

²¹² Ibid., 189.

²¹³ Ibid., 190.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 200.

However, it had implied that this utopianism communism would simply die out; its grounds would be removed once the proletarian struggle had developed into a conscious “political movement.” In other words, it was merely a problem of available scientific “content.” The problem of literary “form” was only raised by the abstraction of the “reactionary” German philosophers. However, the influx of German intellectuals into the SAPD meant that these problems were now merged. The institutional situation of German Social Democracy meant that *the formal problem of abstracted Enlightenment rationality had to be confronted within the domain of proletarian literature itself.*

The second chapter thus expounded the merits of the dialectical conception, which departed from the Enlightenment view of all “things and ... concepts” as “fixed, rigid, and given-for-all-time objects of inquiry.”²¹⁵ Hegelian philosophy had attained the correct view of things, as a state of constant interconnection and flux. However, it was fixated upon ideal essences, and had – as Marx had famously stated in a preface to *Capital* – to be turned on its head and applied to concrete reality. At this point, Engels asserted the scientific validity and objectivity of the dialectical method applied to material phenomena: “Nature is the proof of dialectics, and it must be said for modern natural science that it has supplied this proof with extremely rich, daily increasing material.”²¹⁶ In other words, it was increasingly evident that natural phenomena were not stable, coherent, and clearly defined objects as the rationalists assumed. Such material was also forthcoming in the social realm, giving rise to Marx’s “materialist view of history,” and scientific socialism.²¹⁷ The outbreak of working-class protest showed that capitalism was not a fixed, harmonic, eternal system, but a historical phenomenon riven by transformative energies – that is, the class struggle.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 203.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 205.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 208.

Dialectical thought thus formally transcended the idealistic universalism of Enlightenment rationality that had doomed “utopian” socialism to failure, and was being increasingly validated by the objective content of society and nature. As such, Marx’s “scientific” discoveries had extricated socialism from the realm of bourgeois idealism: “From that time forward, Socialism was no longer an accidental discovery of this or that ingenious brain, but the necessary outcome of the struggle between two historically developed classes – the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.”²¹⁸ The concluding chapter gave an outline of Marx’s dialectical viewpoint on the “evolutionary course [*Entwicklungsgang*]” of social history, passing from medieval society, through bourgeois capitalism, to proletarian revolution.²¹⁹ Within this framework, proletarian class struggle was depicted as the expression of formal economic contradictions within capitalist society, rather than as a direct response to oppression: “The contradiction between socialized production and capitalistic appropriation manifested itself as the antagonism of proletariat and bourgeoisie.”²²⁰ In short, the dialectical understanding of society had brought to light that the modern class struggle was an expression of fundamental contradictions within the capitalist mode of social production.

The successful revolutionary action of the proletariat was then framed as the necessary consequence of coming to consciousness of these underlying economic forces. Engels described how, by comprehending the “blind, violent, destructive” laws underlying social transformation, they could be mastered in the same way as electricity could be channelled for productive use.²²¹ It was in this light that he described the proletariat seizing state power, sweeping away class divisions, and emancipating humanity from blind social forces: “Proletarian Revolution – solution of the contradictions.” The necessity of proletarian revolution according to Marx was thus validated by the dialectical basis of his theory. All the

²¹⁸ Ibid., 208.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 227.

²²⁰ Ibid., 214.

²²¹ Ibid., 222-23.

remained for Marxists to do was “to impart to the now oppressed proletarian class a full knowledge of the conditions and of the meaning of the momentous act it is called upon to accomplish.”²²² From this perspective, the transformation of socialism from “utopia to science” meant that modern European thought had developed into a “form” that was adequate to assist the proletariat in understanding its economic condition.

However, this account of Engels’ argument has thus far only considered the first of its dialectical premises: the universality of the dialectic in nature and society. If we return to the middle chapter on dialectics, we find that it also applied the principle that dialectical laws “form the thread running through the evolutionary history of human thought,” and applied it to the development of socialism. Thus, the two aspects of scientific socialist thought – its content and its form – were themselves subjected to the two general laws of dialectical development. On one hand, the “content” of socialism was subject to the dialectic of quantity and quality. Once a certain quantity of factual data regarding the nature of society became available, the qualitative nature of socialist theory changed. As already mentioned, the facts of class conflict were unavailable to utopian socialists under “immature” capitalist conditions; however, from the 1830s onward, “[t]he teachings of bourgeois economy ... were increasingly belied by the facts,” which “could no longer be ignored” and “made it imperative to submit all past history [i.e. all available facts] to a new examination.” On the other, the theoretical “form” of socialism was subject to the law of “negation of the negation.” The “exclusively mechanical materialism of the eighteenth century” was negated by Hegelian idealism, whose negation in turn by “modern materialism” led to a vastly more powerful comprehension of nature and society – of course, including Marx’s insights into capitalism and class struggle.²²³

²²² Ibid., 228.

²²³ Ibid., 207-08.

Dialectical laws therefore shaped the course of historical evolution from “utopian” to “scientific” socialism. They created the conditions in which Marx’s discoveries became both necessary in content and possible in form. Marx’s “science” was, on one hand, a product of dialectical laws and, on the other, aware of the same dialectical principles; it was thus, in principle, capable of achieving historical self-consciousness, an awareness of the conditions of its own necessity and possibility. In summary, Engels’ “scientific socialism” can be viewed in two ways. On one hand, he asserted the objectivity of dialectical laws within nature and society, and could thus represent Marx’s “scientific socialism” as grounded in reality, unlike the “utopians” who were mired in the illusions of bourgeois rationality. This is the aspect of Engels’ dialectics emphasized in most existing accounts. On the other, however, he asserted the dialectical development of dialectical thought, and could thus represent Marx’s “scientific socialism” as formally self-conscious – unlike the Enlightenment rationalists who believed their own thought to hold universal and eternal validity.

In this sense, the relationship of “scientific socialism” to the proletarian movement was not only that its content had to be “imparted” to the proletariat as “knowledge,” but also that its state of consciousness was *formally* identical with the state that it sought to foster within the modern proletarian movement through this knowledge. This clarifies the grounds upon which Engels could characterize “scientific socialism” not as a set of objective facts addressed towards the workers, but as the “theoretical expression of the proletarian movement.”²²⁴ Establishing the validity of Marxist “scientific socialism” in terms of its formal kinship to the proletariat (rather than the objectivity of its content) was a crucial condition for the formation of German orthodox Marxism, and particularly for its claims regarding the historic “unification of the workers’ movement and socialism” – a notion that is essentially meaningless if considered purely in terms of the factual “content” of socialism.

²²⁴ Ibid., 208.

I have already cited the conclusion of Engels' study of *Feuerbach*, which crystallized the formal kinship between "scientific socialism" and the proletariat, by identifying the German workers as the heir to classical German philosophy. It can now be shown that this assertion was not simply a dogmatic belief in the intellectual capacity of the proletariat, nor merely a rhetorical flight of fancy, but rooted in the autoreferential structure of Engels' dialectical treatment of "proletarian revolution." It can firstly be noted that *Feuerbach* took an even more positive view of modern scientific advancement than was evident in *Anti-Dühring*. Due to its sheer volume of discoveries, modern natural science had achieved an "image of natural interconnections in almost systematic form [*annähernd systematischer Form*]," and a "'system of nature' sufficient for our time [*für unsere Zeit*]." ²²⁵ The same conditions pertained to the "history of society": "The conditions had become so simplified, that one would have to close one's eyes deliberately, not to see in [class conflict] the driving force of modern history." ²²⁶ Insofar as the value of Marxist "scientific socialism" lay in the objective validity of its "content," these developments would render it superfluous. The only value that "scientific socialism" would have under these conditions was as a *form* of inquiry capable of inspiring a certain moral effect within proletarian development.

Unlike in *Evolution*, Engels specified a key difference between natural and social science: "In nature ... there are only blind, unconscious agencies acting upon one another In the history of society, on the contrary, the actors are all endowed with consciousness." Unconscious laws then arose within history because the "conflicts of innumerable individual wills" would always amount to an unforeseen total result, exceeding the consciousness of the individual. This had implications for the task of historical investigation:

²²⁵ Engels, "Feuerbach"; 294-96.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 299.

To ascertain the driving causes which ... in the minds of acting masses and their leaders ... are reflected as conscious motives, clearly or unclearly ... is the only path which can put us on the track of the laws holding sway both in history as a whole, and at particular periods and in particular lands. When ... investigating ... the real ultimate driving forces of history, ... it is not a question so much of the motives of single individuals ... as of those motives which set in motion great masses, whole people, and again whole classes of the people in each people; and this, too, not merely for an instant ... but as a lasting action resulting in a great historical transformation.²²⁷

If a certain formal awareness of this historical grounding of motives could be instilled at the level of “individual wills” *prior* to their amalgamation in mass action, it opened the possibility for a self-conscious mode of mass action that would obviate the need for “leaders.” “Scientific socialism” thus represented an effort to fuse the individual wills of the proletarian mass into a transformative historical action – but led by the proletariat’s self-consciousness rather than through directions imposed from above.

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In 1878, the German chancellor Otto von Bismarck introduced the first of his Socialist Laws, dramatically restricting the activities of the SAPD. This period of illegality and repression is generally considered to have radicalized the party, and consequently strengthened the position

²²⁷ Ibid., 298.

of the Marxists.²²⁸ (In 1885, Engels credited state censorship for the unexpected popularity of *Anti-Dühring*.²²⁹) The impact of Bismarck's laws upon the development of German orthodox Marxism can be further specified at the level of ideas. Engels seemed to focus more on theoretical work during this period – although this can also be linked to Marx's death in 1883, after which Engels increasingly positioned himself as the literary executor and chief propagator of Marx's works. As well as preparing the second (1885) and third (1894) volumes of *Capital* from Marx's manuscripts, Engels produced an analysis of pre-modern anthropology in *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884).

Although the “institutional” aspect of Engels' own writings seemed to diminish during the period of the Socialist Laws, his influence upon German Social Democracy was increased through his mentoring of key party intellectuals such as Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein. Kautsky's rise to prominence within the SAPD began when he co-founded *Neue Zeit* (with Emanuel Wurm) in 1883, announcing it as a “journal for the people [*Volk*].”²³⁰ This slogan had a specific meaning: “The people, for us, consists of all those who through their labour ... forward society. ... [However, t]he great majority of people are still *not* conscious of their task.”²³¹ *Neue Zeit* would address this deficit of “consciousness” through a “[d]emocratization [and] generalization of science” (obviously including social and political science).²³² “To bring science into the knowledge of the people – that is the alpha and omega of our programme.”²³³ Furthermore, it was stated that the journal would “participate in the struggle of [political] parties, insofar as this agrees with the scientific character of our journal”;²³⁴ of course, it would soon become closely linked to the SAPD. In 1883, Kautsky was already a committed Social

²²⁸ Carl E Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905-1917* (Harvard University Press, 1955), 34.

²²⁹ Engels, “Anti-Dühring”; 8.

²³⁰ [Karl Kautsky & Emanuel Wurm,] “An unsere Leser!”; *NZ* 1.i (1883), 1.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

²³² *Ibid.*, 4.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 6.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

Democrat (having been involved in the Austrian party before moving to Germany), but had not yet fully converted to Marxism. The mission statement of *Neue Zeit* provides a significant indication of why the Marxist standpoint appealed to Kautsky. Here one may note the parallels or continuities between the journal's "programme" and the "Erfurt Programme," in which the task of Social Democracy was to make the workers "conscious" of their "nature-necessary goal." One might even say that it was Marxism that allowed Kautsky's participation in "the struggle of parties" to be reconciled with the "scientific character" of his underlying social mission. (It should be remembered that "Marxism" was not an established doctrinal category, but continuously under construction during the textual history being outlined here.)

From 1885 to 1890, Kautsky moved to London to work alongside Engels, producing one major work: *Karl Marx's Economic Teachings* (1887), essentially a popularized summation of the first volume of *Capital*. At the same time, Marxian analysis was increasingly introduced into *Neue Zeit*, also mainly focusing on economic subjects. In this regard, a marker was laid down by the first article of the journal's 1885 run: Engels' "Marx and Rodbertus" (the preface for a new edition of Marx's *Poverty of Philosophy*). Vernon Lidtke has noted the influence of Bismarck's regime upon the development of *Neue Zeit*'s distinctive form of Marxism. Firstly, Lidtke suggests that Kautsky's emphasis upon Marxism as "a system of economic analysis" could be attributed not only to the recent capitalist development of Germany or to Kautsky's personal theoretical proclivities, but also to the likelihood that overtly "political subjects ... would have drawn the attention of the authorities."²³⁵ Secondly, he suggests that the main political impulse behind *Neue Zeit*'s Marxism was that it "offered the most impressive theoretical system for a consistent Social Democratic rebuttal of State Socialism." By "State Socialism," Lidtke refers to a tendency (associated with the ideas of Marx's rival economist Karl Rodbertus), which entailed supporting efforts to ameliorate the

²³⁵ Vernon Lidtke, *The Outlawed Party* (Princeton University Press, 1966), 281-83.

workers' condition through "monopolization and nationalization" measures performed within the framework of the established "monarchical state." This issue was raised with particular force as Bismarck began to pursue a programme of "monopolization and social welfare" from around 1881, with the tacit intention of conserving the state from a workers' revolution.²³⁶ Under these circumstances, the rise of Marxism within the SAPD went hand-in-hand with the perception that Bismarck's repression of the party fundamentally discredited his programme of conservative social reform.

One text is worth highlighting in this context: the "Eisenacher" leader August Bebel's *Woman and Socialism* (1879).²³⁷ Although Bebel is usually placed on the "practical" side of German Social Democracy, his *magnum opus* stood alongside Engels' *Evolution* as a major contributor to the popularization of Marxism in Germany. When, in 1892, Kautsky identified the canonical texts of "German socialist literature," Bebel's *Woman* was the only work he cited other than those by Marx and Engels.²³⁸ Without necessarily questioning the sincerity of Bebel's feminism, it can nonetheless be shown that his treatment of the "woman question" also performed a kind of structural function, in relation to the synthesis of Marxist social theory with the political practice of the SAPD. Consequently, it crystallized a number of the defining features of German orthodox Marxism.

From the outset, Bebel affirmed that the "woman question" was "for us [Social Democrats] only one aspect of the general social question" that "predominantly sets the working masses into motion." Furthermore, "the path to resolution of the woman question [was] also the path to resolution of the worker question": namely, the revolutionary transformation of "contemporary society." For what reason, then, did Bebel treat the social condition of women

²³⁶ Ibid., 156-57.

²³⁷ The text was heavily revised in subsequent editions, and only attained its generally-recognized form in 1883, under the new title of *Woman in the Past, Present, and Future*; later editions then reverted to the original title. My analysis is based on the 1891 edition, which was substantively the same as the 1883 version but with some additional empirical data.

²³⁸ Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm*, vi.

as a “special” and separate topic? As with the “social question,” the “woman question” gave rise to “different parties, who view the question from their particular social and political standpoints.” Firstly, there were outright reactionaries. Secondly, there were “bourgeois” parties that recognized the need for reform, but sought to achieve this strictly within “the framework of contemporary society” by demanding civic and “political rights for the woman.” Here Bebel noted that such measures would not substantively alter the “general condition” of women – for instance, in terms of their sexual exploitation by men. Finally, the standpoint of Social Democracy was, of course, that the integral liberation of women – that is, at an “economic” and “spiritual” as well as “political” level – was “just as impossible under the contemporary social and political arrangements as the resolution of the worker question”; in short, radical transformation was required.²³⁹ Thus, part of the significance of the “woman question” for Bebel was undoubtedly that it demonstrated how the “social and political standpoint” of the Social Democratic workers’ party could also provide an appropriate framework for the emancipation of non-worker elements of society – in line with the Marxist conception of the proletariat as revolutionary liberator of *all* humankind.

Accordingly, after a lengthy discussion of the social oppression of women, the main section of Bebel’s text (“Woman in the Present”) concluded with two chapters that presented a *general* picture of social transformation, and referred only in passing to aspects of the “woman question.” Firstly, “State and Society” predicted the imminent collapse of capitalist society; secondly, “The Socialization of Society” gave a broad outline of the future socialist society. Both of these accounts were explicitly underpinned by key Marxist principles, which Bebel sought to verify through an extremely detailed conspectus of contemporary social data (focusing on Germany). However, the significance of Bebel’s work for the development of German orthodox Marxism was not simply in providing empirical support for Marx’s theories;

²³⁹ August Bebel, *Die Frau und der Sozialismus* (Stuttgart: Dietz, 1891), 1-5.

his depictions of contemporary society also implied a specific relationship between Marxist ideas and the “social and political standpoint” of the SAPD.

In the “State and Society” chapter, Bebel asserted that “[t]he foundation of our social situation is the capitalist economic system,” and described its general tendency to replace “small businesses” with large-scale industrial enterprises due to the “competition between capitalists,” leading inevitably to “crises” of “overproduction, as the result of blind mass-production” and, ultimately, the collapse of the capitalist system.²⁴⁰ The necessary solution was a “great expropriation” through which the “means of labour” would be converted from “private property” into “social property.”²⁴¹ (The “Erfurt Programme” would later present essentially the same vision.) A large part of the chapter provided a survey of contemporary economic data corroborating this Marxist hypothesis. However, this empirical analysis was framed by a more nebulous argument, concerning a general state of “unrest, fermentation, and dissolution” stirred up by the “rapid development” and “growing instability” of modern “social life” in recent decades.²⁴² Here Bebel depicted a general situation of political instability and administrative disorder at both national and municipal levels of governance, and of consequent moral degradation and crime (“[l]ying, swindle, deceit, forgery, perjury”) due to the intensifying “struggle for existence” – for instance, driving large numbers of women “into the arms of prostitution.”²⁴³ The chapter’s conclusion then offered the expectation “that at a certain point in time, all of the described evils will be driven to such a height that their presence to the great majority of the populace [*Bevölkerung*] becomes not only clear and visible but also unbearable, and a general, irresistible demand for fundamental reconfiguration will grip almost the whole of society.”²⁴⁴ In other words, the sociopolitical milieu within which the SAPD operated was

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 232-35.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 260.

²⁴² Ibid., 224-25.

²⁴³ Ibid., 228-30.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 260.

rapidly becoming sufficient in itself to generate a popular demand for revolutionary transformation; its insupportability was becoming immediately tangible to all members of society. What the Marxist standpoint provided in this context was not an *awareness* of the structural flaws within capitalist society or a warning of its imminent collapse, but rather a basis for *comprehending* the already-visible chaos, instability, and moral decay of modern social life.

In “The Socialization of Society [*Sozialisierung der Gesellschaft*],” Bebel gave a general outline of how social life and production would operate on a higher plane after the revolutionary expropriation of private property: “Society ... will have discovered the laws of its own development and ... apply them in a goal-conscious [*zweckbewußt*] manner towards its higher development.”²⁴⁵ Here we confront a paradoxical aspect of German orthodox Marxism. Despite presenting itself in the explicitly anti-utopian guise of “scientific socialism,” it nonetheless produced several elaborate depictions of the future socialist society, far exceeding the conceptions provided by Marx’s writings. In this regard, Marx had supplied little beyond the ideal of a “communist society” freed from class antagonisms, in which the “slavish subordination of individuals to the division of labour” would be replaced by “all-round development of the individual” through creative work.²⁴⁶ Bebel and others (such as Kautsky in his 1902 work *Die soziale Revolution*) gave concrete parameters to this new mode of production. Thus, despite refusing to engage in “utopian” speculations regarding the moment of revolutionary transformation itself, the German orthodox Marxists were happy to detail the probable workings of the post-revolutionary society. Two factors help to explain this apparent contradiction. Firstly, the orthodox Marxists assigned a specific sense to the “utopian,” which linked it more to philosophical or literary *abstraction from social reality* than to the specific

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 264. Here it is worth noting the distinction in German between the *sozial* (tending to denote a *principle of sociality*) and the *gesellschaftlich* (tending to denote *social structure*).

²⁴⁶ Marx, “Kritik”; 21.

act of describing a future society. Secondly, we saw in Bebel's preceding chapter how the contemporary "social reality" confronted by German Social Democracy was represented as having reached a point where *its continuous dialectical development had become an immediately-visible fact of lived experience*. If the collapse of capitalist society had become visible in the form of instability and moral degradation, the prospective nature of socialist society was similarly emerging in the guise of technological and administrative advancements, through which certain enclaves of social production were already operating in a higher, "goal-conscious" manner.

A notable example in this regard, which had a diffuse presence across the entire canon of German orthodox Marxism, was the phenomenon of "electricity." Urban electrification was a phenomenon that emerged dramatically in Europe during the 1880s, and by 1890 Berlin was acknowledged as the world-leading city for amenities such as street lighting.²⁴⁷ In *Evolution*, Engels described the difference between anarchic capitalist production and planned socialist production as akin to the difference "between the destructive force of electricity in lightning ... and the tamed electricity of the telegraph."²⁴⁸ In *Woman*, Bebel noted that electricity was already having a "revolutionary effect" in the "bourgeois world," but claimed that the "fullest utilization and most extensive application" of such "natural forces" would only be attained in a "socialized society."²⁴⁹ In his 1892 commentary on the "Erfurt Programme," Kautsky stated that: "The course of [social] development [becomes] ever more rapid, until it has finally today, in the age ... of electricity, become so fast, that we can track it with our own eyes without comparison to earlier times."²⁵⁰ Again, the function of Marxism in this context was not to reveal the underlying tendencies of social development, but rather to provide an intellectual

²⁴⁷ See: Thomas Parke Hughes, *Networks of Power: Electrification in Western Society, 1880-1930* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 175-200.

²⁴⁸ Engels, "Entwicklung"; 223.

²⁴⁹ Bebel, *Frau*, 278.

²⁵⁰ Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm*, 3.

framework for grasping and thus controlling an array of tendencies that were already becoming publicly apparent. This sphere of public visibility was also, one might add, the domain of political parties.

In summary, Bebel's account of the transition from capitalist to socialist society did not merely provide a concrete illustration of Marxist principles supported by contemporary data, but also situated Marxism within a "modern" social milieu that was effectively beginning to reveal the secrets of its own dialectical development. Under these circumstances, the role of Marxist theory was not to state the case for social transformation, but rather to provide a basis for comprehending and controlling the visible transformations already underway. For Bebel, Marxism could furnish an objective understanding of certain subjective moods prevalent within contemporary society; pessimism associated with moral decadence and optimism associated with technological advancement could be rationalized through Marx's historical-materialist analysis of capitalist society. This was the cardinal value of Marxist principles for the "social and political standpoint" of German Social Democracy – particularly insofar as the SAPD sought to participate in the public discourse of political parties, extending the significance of the "worker question" beyond strictly-proletarian circles.

The conclusion of Bebel's text drew out a further consequence of this argument, positing that Germany would play the "leading role" in the "next developmental period" of social advancement, due to its "overproduction of intelligence [*Intelligenz*]." ²⁵¹ The belatedness of Germany's national development (in comparison to England and France) had left it with a decentralized sprawl of administrative structures, requiring the education of civil servants; unification in 1871 had thus left Germany with a surfeit of intellectuals, creating what Bebel called a "proletariat of scholars and artists."²⁵² This was precisely the appropriate

²⁵¹ Bebel, *Frau*, 373-74.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 379.

audience for Marxist theory when construed as a basis for comprehending society as a whole. Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto* (1848) had briefly noted that capitalist development would push certain "segments of the ruling class" into the proletariat, thereby introducing "elements of culture [*Bildungselemente*]." ²⁵³ For the orthodox Marxists, many of whom were indeed "converts" from the bourgeois intelligentsia, this process became a central concern – developed, for example, in Kautsky's 1895 article "The Intellectuals [*Intelligenz*] and Social Democracy." In this regard also, Bebel's *Woman* was a seminal representation of the German orthodox Marxist standpoint.

When the Socialist Laws lapsed in 1890, German orthodox Marxism could assert itself at a programmatic level. The SAPD was renamed as the SPD, *Neue Zeit* was adopted as an official party organ, and the now-dominant Eisenacher leaders could push through the demand for a new party programme, to be ratified the following year at the party's Erfurt Congress. Existing interpretations of the 1891 programme have usually emphasized its deterministic nature: "Socialism was defined in the 'Erfurt Programme' not as a matter of will, but rather as the consequence of a 'nature-necessary' process," and rested upon a "belief in the natural necessity of social development [as] laid out in the Marxian *oeuvre*." ²⁵⁴ Several historians have argued that Marxist determinism allowed the programme to synthesize "radical theory and moderate practice," providing a revolutionary horizon for the SPD's reformist activities. ²⁵⁵ Representing the revolution as an organic and ultimately-inevitable historical development has thus been viewed as a basis for compromise between radicals and moderates within the party, ²⁵⁶ and as a

²⁵³ Marx/ Engels, "Manifest der kommunistischen Partei"; 471.

²⁵⁴ Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, *Das Mandat des Intellektuellen* (Berlin: Siedler, 1986), 77.

²⁵⁵ Erich Matthias, "Kautsky und der Kautskyanismus"; Irving Fetscher (ed.), *Marxismusstudien* [vol. 2] (Tübingen: Mohr, 1957), 160-61; Günther Roth, *Social Democrats in Imperial Germany*, 163-70.

²⁵⁶ Schorske, *German Social Democracy*, 4-6.

“sociopsychological” means of coping with the slim prospects of immediate revolution in the *Kaiserreich*.²⁵⁷

My analysis of German orthodox Marxism sets Erfurt doctrine in a new light. The adaptation of Marxist theory to the practical purposes of the SPD was not an isolated political task confronted by the architects of the new programme, but an integral aspect of “Marxist” writing since at least 1875. Furthermore, we have seen how the crux of the logic binding Marxism to German Social Democracy was not revolutionary determinism, but rather an analysis linking the sociocultural effect of Marxist “science” to the contemporary sociopolitical milieu of the SPD. The “natural necessity” of the “Erfurt Programme” marked this link between society and science – between the increasingly-apparent tendencies of “modern bourgeois society” and the SPD’s theoretical clarification of these tendencies – more than it implied a simple historical inevitability. This is not to say that an element of determinism was not present, both explicitly and implicitly, within the writings under analysis; the issue is whether it should be regarded as central and foundational to our interpretations of German orthodox Marxism, or as one constituent of a more complex ideological structure.

Kautsky’s pre-1890 notions of bringing science to “popular consciousness” were not simply eclipsed or subsumed by the notion of objective “proletarian” development. They were still pertinent due to the party-political nature of Social Democracy:

Social Democracy ... has ... the tendency, to become more and more a *national party*, which is to say a people’s party [*Volkspartei*], in the sense that it is the representative not of industrial wage-workers alone, but of working and oppressed strata in general, and thus the great majority of the populace

²⁵⁷ Dieter Groh, *Negative Integration und revolutionärer Attentismus* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Ullstein, 1973) 57-59.

[*Gesamtbevölkerung*], which one usually calls [the] “people”
[*Volk*].²⁵⁸

Insofar as the SPD was making strategic use of the bourgeois-democratic apparatus, its statements and actions were all still effectively addressed to the “people,” or at least to its overwhelming majority – in other words, the non-proletarianized working classes. The broad, popularizing aim of the *Neue Zeit* had not been superseded by the aim of imparting “Marxian teachings” to the proletariat; the latter was a specific task within the framework of the former. Furthermore, if we return to the mission statement of *Neue Zeit*, we find that its “duty” of fostering popular self-consciousness – making the “people” aware of their social “task” – was couched less as a matter of providing objective knowledge of their conditions, and more as a matter of instilling a certain sense of social mission. In other words, it was presented as an effort to fuse individual wills into a historical mass action, but led by self-consciousness rather than through directions imposed from above.

In this light, Stanley Pierson’s account of Kautsky’s development as “party theoretician” requires a slight adjustment. For Pierson, “Kautsky’s initial approach to the problem of educating the workers was highly rationalistic” – it was simply a matter of providing a “summary” of Marx’s ideas for workers, whose comprehension he saw as relatively unproblematic. Later, however, as the task of propagation proved more difficult, Kautsky perceived the need for *Neue Zeit* to pursue a special “educational mission,” separate and complementary to other Social Democratic activities.²⁵⁹ Furthermore, this “mission” was given somewhat evangelical overtones by Kautsky’s belief that “Marxism represented a new world view, a comprehensive set of truths for humanity.”²⁶⁰ Pierson’s account is certainly valid, but

²⁵⁸ Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm*, 252.

²⁵⁹ Stanley Pierson, *Marxist Intellectuals and the Working-class Mentality in Germany, 1887-1912* (Harvard University Press, 1993), 62.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

only insofar as the propagation of Marxism within the proletariat is seen as the outer horizon of Kautsky's work. Yet the *Neue Zeit* opening statement would suggest that Kautsky's conceptualization of an "educational mission" *preceded* and therefore *framed* his efforts to address the "proletariat," rather than arising later in response to unforeseen difficulties. On the same basis, it can be posited that Kautsky's evangelizing of Marxism as a radically "new worldview" was not merely a rhetorical ploy, an attempt to promote ideas that were struggling to break through – it was also a way of linking the role of the Marxist intellectual to the wider aims of creating "popular self-consciousness."

Such a link was forged in *Economic Teachings*, which Pierson identifies with the early, "rationalistic" stage of Kautsky's work, when his only concern was to spread Marx's ideas in manageable form. However, beneath its stated aim of summarizing *Capital* for the benefit of proletarian readers, this text also identified Marxist writing with the *Neue Zeit* project of instilling a self-conscious sense of social mission within the "people." As previously mentioned, in the conclusion of *Economic Teachings*, Kautsky extended Engels' argument regarding how Marx's "negative critique," when applied to the full breadth of a philosophical "system," could generate a "positive representation" of the dialectical method. Kautsky's version of this argument was bolder in its claims: "one cannot criticize, without acquiring a higher knowledge; one cannot demolish a scientific system, without erecting another, grander and more comprehensive one behind it." In this case, the system that Marx had negated was the entirety of "bourgeois" or "vulgar" political economy, whose "economic representations" obscured the reality of "modern modes of production." Marx's critique of these representations had led to a "positive" and constructive outcome, even the herals of "a new epoch ... for mankind." More specifically, Kautsky asserted that: "From the standpoint to which Marx raises us, one knows not only that all efforts of the vulgar economists ... were in vain One also knows the only way that remains for the advancement [*Fortentwicklung*] of society" – namely, "the methodical,

conscious [*bewußte*] organization of social production.” This was a direct reference to the aforementioned description, in Engels’ *Evolution*, of mankind taking control of natural laws and becoming the master of its historical actions.²⁶¹

Thus, Marx’s “higher standpoint,” built upon the ruins of bourgeois political economy, could be used for the specific mode of popularization intended by *Neue Zeit* – that is, to instil a sense of social mission in a large mass of the “people,” rooted in a self-consciousness of how their work contributes to the advancement of society. This popularizing vision added a layer of significance to the text’s economic conclusions, particularly the precept that: “The more [that] capitalist modes of production [are] predominant, the more that the mass of people [*Masse des Volkes*] consists of wage-workers, [and] the more that it therefore remains shut out from the fruits of the increased productivity of its labour.”²⁶² One aspect of this statement fits the prevailing interpretation of Kautsky: by positing the proletarianization of the “mass of people” as an inevitable trend, this “scientific” precept would guarantee the legitimacy and success of the SPD’s democratic mode of struggle. However, we should note that proletarianization does not, in this depiction, cause the “mass of people” to be shut out from the fruits of its productive work, but rather crystallizes (in material, economic terms) an already-existing state of alienation at the level of popular consciousness. The “people” are already shut out from the fruits of their work because they are unaware of its purpose in furthering society; waged work simply exploits this fact for purposes of economic expropriation. If Marx’s writing could instil self-consciousness at a popular level, its political value for the proletarian movement would no longer simply be to provide “scientific” guidelines or guarantees, but also a kind of moral effect. In short, when *morally* self-conscious workers became proletarianized, their influx could introduce a sense of mission to the *material* self-consciousness of the proletarian movement.

²⁶¹ Kautsky, *Ökonomische Lehren*, 266-68.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 264.

(This point will be developed further when I examine Kautsky's *Erfurt Programme* commentary.)

Kautsky described Marx's achievement in more specific terms: "Marx was the first ... who deduced the aims of the present social movement as naturally-necessary consequences from the precedent [*bisherigen*] historical development."²⁶³ The term "natural necessity" was thus introduced into Kautsky's vision of popular self-consciousness. Examining the wider argument leading up to this statement will illuminate a crucial point. In the context of Marx's critique of bourgeois "economic representations," the significance of "natural necessity" was tied less to its connotations of mechanical inevitability and scientific certitude, and more to the possibility of seizing conscious control of the forces of social production. Crucially, the reason that Marxist *Naturnotwendigkeit* was endowed with this moral significance was not simply because Marx had identified the objective natural laws underlying capitalist development, but because his theory stood in opposition to the concept of *Naturnotwendigkeit* as it was employed by bourgeois political economists.

In short, Kautsky's summary of Marx's economic theories staged a semantic conflict between bourgeois and Marxist *Naturnotwendigkeit*. In its bourgeois usage, the term became (or made political economy into) an instrument of capitalist rule over the workers. For example, Kautsky described how Thomas Malthus' theories of overpopulation and scarcity implied that "unemployment and hunger ... are by natural necessity the lot of at least a part of the working class," because the worker population increased at a faster rate than the available food.²⁶⁴ In this argument, *Naturnotwendigkeit* denoted an uncontrollable and implacable economic law, which therefore represented the situation of the workers as a pre-ordained fact, which conscious human action could never fully alleviate. In deriving the "aims of the present social movement"

²⁶³ Ibid., 267.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 234.

from the *Naturnotwendigkeit* of history, Marx did not merely posit an alternative set of necessary laws, which led towards proletarian revolution rather than eternal bourgeois capitalism. He also brought *Naturnotwendigkeit* into the domain of self-conscious human control. After Marx, the workers would no longer view the *Naturnotwendigkeit* of political economy as an iron rule to which they had no choice to submit, but rather as a guideline and guarantee for their self-conscious historical action.

Kautsky did not develop this argument solely by juxtaposing the views of bourgeois economists and Marx. The semantic contest between bourgeois and Marxist *Naturnotwendigkeit* was deeply embedded in his exposition of Marx's theory. Its first appearance in *Economic Teachings* occurred in a chapter on the subject of "relative surplus value." Here a brief exposition of Marx's theory will be necessary. "Surplus value" refers to the value that capitalists expropriate from labour – specifically, the amount of value that the labour force adds to production without being compensated through wages or otherwise. For Marx, "surplus value" was the ultimate basis of capitalist profit, whereas profit obtained through means such as pricing merely circulated or redistributed profit around the capitalist class. Marx then distinguished two ways in which capitalists could maximize their surplus value: on one hand, "absolute" surplus value, gained by increasing the *duration* of labour (maximizing the length of working hours); on the other, "relative" surplus value, gained by increasing the *intensity* or *cost-efficiency* of labour within the same duration. Relative surplus value could be increased through three main levers: by lowering wages, by lowering the prices of wage-goods, or through technical refinement of the production process.

It was specifically in relation to technical refinement as a means of increasing relative surplus value that Kautsky first invoked the concept of *Naturnotwendigkeit*, stating that a "constant refinement of the means of production is a natural necessity for the capitalist system of production." Furthermore, the "individual capitalist" was "not necessarily conscious" of this

necessity. Instead, it was the inherent factor of capitalist “competition” that imposed a steady “improvement of the work-means or work-methods” upon owners of the means of production.²⁶⁵ All of the other ways through which the capitalist class could increase its surplus value – maximizing the duration of work, or minimizing wages and the cost of wage-goods – were rooted in economic decisions enacted consciously by individual capitalists in order to increase their profit, leading to the overall benefit of the capitalist class. It was only in the case of technical refinement that an external law of economic necessity interceded in the process, in a manner to which both individual capitalists and bourgeois political economy were blind.

The implications of this bourgeois-capitalist blindspot became clearer when Kautsky’s text turned to the subject of “co-operation.” Co-operation was presented as a special form of technical refinement, or a way of improving the productivity of “work-methods.” However, this refinement intensified productivity through conscious social planning rather than material or mechanical advancements; it constituted “a new, social productive power.” Primitive communist societies had been rooted in co-operation, and the Marxists of course envisaged that it would, in expanded and modernized form, provide the basis of the future socialist society. In capitalist society, however, the role of co-operation was limited. To somewhat shorten this argument: because the mass-scale of capitalist production greatly exceeded that of primitive society, it had required the “despotic rule of capitalists” to administrative effectively over the different elements of capitalist “mass-force [*Massenkraft*]” – that is, the mass workforce, raw materials, and capital.²⁶⁶ Malthus’ overpopulation theory epitomized the standpoint of the capitalist administrator in this regard, viewing the workers and raw foodstuff as mass powers to be managed rationally from above.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 133.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 137.

Thus, the enlarged scale of modern social production compared with that of primitive communism meant that the “despotic rule of capital over labour [*Arbeit*]” initially served a “technical necessity,” by providing the “leadership [*Leitung*] of production” on a mass scale. Here, however, “bourgeois economy” committed its main offence: that is, it “declared” that capitalist rule *as such* had a “technical necessity, dictated by the state of things” in “social nature,” and was therefore the “naturally-necessary precondition of civilization.”²⁶⁷ This civilizing mission had energized the bourgeoisie in its efforts to revolutionize primitive society, but entailed stagnation now that its class rule had been established. Hence the “economic representations” of bourgeois political economy depicted the state of production as if it were pre-civilizational, with workers depicted as the equivalent of “hunters and fishers, who freely command the forest and sea,” as a justification for the continuation of capitalist rule.²⁶⁸

Since bourgeois thought perceived the situation of “things” in nature as fixed and eternal, rather than a constant state of historical flux, it did not recognize the possibility for “leadership of production” to shift progressively into the conscious control of the workers themselves. Here was where the terminology of bourgeois political economy could be turned against its own standpoint. As already noted, technical refinement was imposed upon individual capitalists as a natural necessity by the anarchic system of competition. Driven by competition, the capitalists could not help but move in an effectively co-operative direction, especially in the form of large industrial monopolies – as the opening sentence of the “Erfurt Programme” would assert. This development, greatly simplifying the mass-administrative tasks of production, would prepare the path for the “planned conscious organization of social production” by workers themselves, the ultimate technical refinement of “work-methods.”

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 139.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 265.

In this light, the Marxist concept of natural necessity (as much Kautsky's invention as it was a feature of Marx's writings) was not merely a scientific guarantee of future developments, but also a basis for the workers to become "conscious" of the natural laws determining production, to comprehend the mission of social progress to which their labour was contributing, and thus inherit the "leadership of production" from the bourgeoisie. In his 1892 commentary on the *Erfurt Programme*, this point was developed explicitly in a segment on "The set-up of the future state." Here Kautsky addressed the common criticism that Social Democracy had failed to provide a practicable model of the future state that it sought to establish. Against this, Kautsky rehearsed the distinction between bourgeois-utopian and scientific socialism, arguing that opponents who insisted that socialists had to provide a blueprint for the new society were stuck in the utopian mindset of "liberal thinkers" or "the social science of a hundred years ago." Marx and Engels had now shown that "social history" was "determined ... not by the ideas of men, but by economic development," and, of course, that "irresistable economic development leads to the bankruptcy of the capitalist mode of production with natural necessity."²⁶⁹

This afforded an opportunity for Kautsky to relate the "natural necessity" of "scientific socialism" to the conscious direction of social progress. Rather than attempting to "wilfully determine" the future social order, the strength of Social Democracy was its capacity to "ascertain the tendencies that led to such a new social order, to the end that its political activity could be a *conscious*, and not merely an *instinctive*, one." In this regard, German Social Democracy had an unprecedented power, because:

... it stands upon the shoulders of capitalist political economy,
the first to undertake a scientific investigation of social relations

²⁶⁹ Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm*, 135.

and conditions, and to which it can be ascribed, that the [bourgeois] revolutionary classes that overthrew the feudal system of production had a much clearer consciousness [Bewußtsein] of their social tasks [Aufgaben] ... than any other revolutionary class before them.

“Economic science” was thus defined as the means by which a “revolutionary class” – in this context, the class that pushes forward the economic development of society – attains a clear consciousness of the nature and grounds of its actions. However, as we have seen, bourgeois consciousness of economic “natural necessity” reached a certain limit, due to the antagonistic tendencies of “competition” and “co-operation.” Hence it was surpassed by the proletarian standpoint of Social Democracy, and the “natural necessity” of the “Erfurt Programme.” Thanks to the writings of scientific socialism, particularly “Marx’s *Capital*”: “so much higher stands the insight and goal-consciousness [Zielbewußtheit] of Social Democracy than [that] of the revolutionary classes ... at the start of the century.”²⁷⁰

Kautsky *Erfurt Programme* commentary has been described as “the authoritative exposition ... of scientific socialism in its politically operational form.”²⁷¹ This text covered much of the same ground as the two aforementioned chapters of Bebel’s *Woman*, from the “downfall of small business” under capitalism to the heightened productivity of the socialist “future state.” However, in Kautsky’s text, the “classical” Marxist theory of proletarian class development – that is, the growing unity and consciousness of the industrial working classes under capitalism – was pushed into the foreground.²⁷² Existing interpretations of Kautsky’s commentary again

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 142.

²⁷¹ Adam Przeworski, “Proletariat into a Class”; *Politics and Society* 7.4 (December 1977), 344.

²⁷² Here it will be illustrative to list the chapters of Kautsky’s commentary: 1. “The Downfall of Small Business”; 2. “The Proletariat”; 3. “The Capitalist Class”; 4. “The Future State”; 5. “The Class Struggle.”

tend to root his standpoint in the “necessary laws of social development” according to Marxist “science,” and often focus on the theoretical problems that arose when Kautsky attempted to incorporate “the active role of parties and other political forces” into this deterministic logic.²⁷³ This relates particularly to a key sequence of arguments in its final chapter on “The Class Struggle”: firstly, that parliamentary agitation was a valid and – in the contemporary circumstances – essential mode of proletarian struggle;²⁷⁴ secondly, that the development of the proletariat led organically to the formation of a “workers’ party,” which would “with natural necessity” tend towards a Social Democratic standpoint;²⁷⁵ thirdly, that Social Democracy represented the “unification of socialism and the workers’ movement” on the “scientific” basis of Marxist theory.²⁷⁶ These arguments have generally been viewed as the epitome of how Erfurt doctrine used “the notion of historical necessity” to form an iron link “between the ultimate socialist goals and the daily ... political activity” of the SPD: “In Kautsky’s writings the concrete action of Social Democracy appeared to fulfil a necessarily predetermined verdict of the laws of social evolution.”²⁷⁷

However, my reinterpretation of German orthodox Marxism suggests that this text can be read in precisely the opposite direction. Again, the point here is not to deny that Kautsky believed in the organic development of the proletariat, but to suggest that this was not the *sine qua non* of his “Marxist” standpoint. Recalling the mission statement of *Neue Zeit*, we know that an attempt to mediate between “science” and the activity of “political parties” was a fundamental impulse behind Kautsky’s writing, pre-dating his conversion to Marxism. For the reasons highlighted in Bebel’s work, Marx’s analysis of dialectical social development provided a particularly apt ideological vehicle for the project of spreading “science” to the

²⁷³ Przeworski, “Proletariat”; 347-51.

²⁷⁴ Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm*, 223-25.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 231.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 239.

²⁷⁷ Massimo L Salvadori, *Karl Kautsky and the Socialist Revolution, 1880-1938* (London: Verso, 1990), 32-33.

“people” – particularly, it would seem, in the context of “modern” German society in the “age of electricity.” From this perspective, it was the apparatus of parliamentary democracy, political parties, and social science (the sphere of rational public discourse) that can be viewed as the foundation of Kautsky’s revolutionary vision. The theoretical problem that he confronted in his 1892 commentary was how to reincorporate the hypothesis of “necessary” proletarian class-formation – and its accompanying politics of class struggle – into the SPD’s specialized sociopolitical application of Marxist theory. In other words, it was the principle of organic proletarian development that disrupted his fundamental “Marxist” logic of party-political activity, not the other way round. (The way in which the “proletariat” took over Kautsky’s fundamental “scientific” project can be seen in the prefaces to successive editions of *Marx’s Economic Teachings*. In the original 1886 preface, Kautsky stated that the book was intended to correct misunderstandings of Marx in “recent German economic literature,” which formed part of a wider literature through which the “German people [*Volk*] have developed their culture and science.”²⁷⁸ In a new preface for the 1892 edition, published shortly after the *Erfurt* commentary, Kautsky restated this aim of the work: “Its primary purpose [was] originally ... to facilitate ... the proletariat in the study of Marxian teachings.”²⁷⁹)

Kautsky thus sought to demonstrate that the “classical” proletariat was, in fact, the ideal class to carry out the democratic-scientific process of transformation that modern social life had begun to make possible – which Bebel’s *Woman* had originally outlined as a supplementary addition to the core politics of the “worker question.” He emphasized the sociopolitical capacity and competence of the proletariat: for instance, in its parliamentary activity, the workers’ involvement within the “modern method of production” had given them a superior “understanding of the totality of phenomena” and made it easier for them “to grasp party

²⁷⁸ Karl Kautsky, *Ökonomische Lehren*, vii–viii.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, xv.

principles and cleave to a principled politics, uninfluenced by momentary moods, personal or local interests.”²⁸⁰ The proletariat’s growing awareness of its situation under capitalism was given the connotations of a *Bildungsroman* narrative; by gaining “self-consciousness” of its productive role and capacities, the industrial working class was in the course of becoming “a new class with a new morality and a new philosophy,” which would lead society to a higher stage in its development.²⁸¹ Finally, Marxist theory provided the ultimate intellectual framing for this project, by giving the “militant [*kämpfenden*] proletariat ... a clear consciousness of its historical tasks” – but not, it may be noted, of its social or economic situation, which it would grasp automatically.²⁸² In this way, the classical proletariat was restored to the lead role within the distinctive “German orthodox Marxist” vision of revolution as society consciously grasping the laws of its own development. Several interpreters have noted Kautsky’s idea of a moral or intellectual “new consciousness” awakening within the proletariat, rather than a mere awareness of its economic conditions. However, this has invariably been interpreted as either a gap in his orthodox logic, at which point he “[fell] back on a commonsense assertion of human agency,”²⁸³ or a “proselytising” and “emotional” rhetorical device that operated in conjunction with the “necessary” arguments of “scientific socialism.”²⁸⁴ Conversely, the preceding analysis has shown how the course of “Marxist” writing since 1875 had gradually developed the premises for Kautsky’s “new consciousness,” into which he reintegrated the classical Marxist logic of proletarian development in his *Erfurt* commentary.

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²⁸⁰ Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm*, 222.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 198.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 239.

²⁸³ Pierson, *Marxist Intellectuals*, 65.

²⁸⁴ Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered*, 41-42; 80-81.

In 1895, the politics of Erfurt seemed to receive an authoritative Marxist justification in one of Engels' last published texts before his death: a preface to a new edition of Marx's *Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850* (originally 1851). Engels's foreword provided theoretical support for the SPD's use of universal suffrage as a revolutionary weapon, and was consequently reproduced as a standalone piece – firstly in the party organ *Vorwärts*, then (as Engels was dissatisfied with alterations that had moderated his standpoint on the future possibility of revolution) in *Neue Zeit*. Existing analyses of the 1895 foreword have generally focused on its assertion that “rebellion in the old style, the street-struggle with barricades” had become “antiquated” since 1848, due to advancements in the counter-revolutionary military force at the disposal of modern states.²⁸⁵ For this reason, Engels seemed to suggest that “the revolutionary model developed in *The Communist Manifesto* [had] turned out to be an illusion,” and in place of an immediate proletarian uprising advocated – at least, for the moment – a gradual, democratic mode of struggle.²⁸⁶ Engels' analysis also reflected a confidence (perhaps even an institutional mythology) engendered by the recent electoral successes of the SPD. In 1890, the newly-legalized party won the highest popular vote in the German federal election (although this was not proportionally translated into *Reichstag* seats) with 1.4 million votes, and increased this to 1.8 million in 1893.²⁸⁷ Engels thus spoke of the “special status” and “special task” afforded to “German Social Democracy” by its “two million voters,” who formed the “most numerous, most compact mass ... of the international proletarian army.”²⁸⁸

The SPD's instrumentation of Engels' foreword (and the attendant controversy over its alterations) has perhaps diverted historiographical attention away from the text's original purpose – as an exegetical introduction to Marx's *Class Struggles* – and the arguments that it

²⁸⁵ Engels, “Einleitung (1895)”; 519.

²⁸⁶ Manfred B Steger, “Engels and the Origins of German Revisionism”; Steger & Carver (eds.), *Engels after Marx*, 192.

²⁸⁷ The SPD won the highest popular vote in every federal election from 1890 up to the First World War, finally gaining the largest number of *Reichstag* seats in 1912 with over 4 million votes.

²⁸⁸ Engels, “Einleitung”; 524.

developed at this level. What we find here is an explicit representation of Marxist “scientific socialism” as a valid *party-programmatic doctrine*, which fundamentally conditioned Engels’ subsequent statements regarding German Social Democracy. *Class Struggles* was not a broad theoretical sketch like the *Communist Manifesto*, but rather Marx’s “first attempt” to apply “his materialist outlook” to “contemporary political events.” This mode of analysis could not possibly call upon a comprehensive set of economic data (“clear understanding of the economic history of a given period is never contemporary”), and instead had to apply the “materialist method” in a “restricted” manner. Significantly, a key element of this “restricted” method was “to establish separate political parties as the more or less adequate political expression” of different “classes and class fractions.” Subsequent analyses with the benefit of economic data had, Engels claimed, proven this “contemporary” application of Marx’s methods to be valid. This fact underlay the “special significance” of *Class Struggles* as a historic piece of writing: namely, that it had “pronounced, for the first time, the formula through which the general consensus of the workers’ parties in all countries of the world [today] briefly summarize their demand for economic reorganization: the appropriation of the means of production by society.” (We have seen how variations of this formula ran through the canon of German orthodox Marxism.) In other words, Marx’s materialist method was not only sufficient to comprehend contemporary political parties as class phenomena, but had also allowed him to formulate in advance the programmatic basis for the coming wave of proletarian parties – including, of course, the SPD.²⁸⁹

Engels’ subsequent statements on German Social Democracy were closely tied to the party-programmatic validity of Marxist writing. This was clearest when he discussed the “special task” of the SPD, to demonstrate the use of “universal suffrage” as a revolutionary “weapon” to “its comrades of all nations” – particularly in the “Romantic countries” such as

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 509-11.

France, where the workers had historically tended to view “voting rights as a snare.” Through its disciplined success, the German party had begun to show how suffrage could be “in the words of the French Marxist programme [that is, the programme drafted by Marx for Jules Guesde’s *Parti ouvrier* in 1880], *transformed from the means of deception that it has been until now, into an instrument of emancipation* [Engels cited these words in the original French].”²⁹⁰

As important as the sentiment expressed here was the citation of a “Marxist programme” already present within the very nation that German Social Democracy was seeking to influence by its example. The “special status” and “special task” of the SPD were therefore linked to the fact that its actions were providing a concrete proof of Marxist theory *in its party-programmatic form*. Engels’ remarks concerning the outdated “revolutionary model” of the *Communist Manifesto* can be understood in this light. The aspect of the *Manifesto* that had been disproven was, of course, not its general theoretical principles, but rather its expectation that the proletarian revolution was an immediate (“contemporary”) possibility. This had been expressed in its literary form; the “manifesto” was intended as a singular piece of “world literature” (“to be published in English, French, German ... ”²⁹¹), which would address and unite the “proletarians of all countries” in one stroke. In Engels’ 1895 foreword, the literary role of the Marxist “manifesto” was taken up by the party-programmatic Marxist “formulae” that had diffused across the workers’ movement since 1848. This specialized, “contemporary” application of Marxist writing could not be subject to the same disappointment as the *Manifesto*, because its dissemination was in itself a marker of the maturation of the proletarian movement. Yet Marxism in this guise could still function as a theoretical lodestar, guiding and elevating the consciousness of the international workers’ movement – on condition of being acted out by the world-leading representative of “scientific socialism,” German Social Democracy.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 518.

²⁹¹ Marx/Engels, “Manifest”; 461.

As previously stated, Engels' foreword began by characterizing the "illusion" that he and Marx had shared in the immediate wake of 1848, that the revolutionary energies of the period were leading towards a proletarian seizure of power; however, "history has ... proven us wrong," and the "mode of struggle of 1848 is now in all respects antiquated [*veraltet*]." Engels firstly explained that these illusory assumptions had been due to the apparently consistent model of revolutionary struggle identifiable in "all revolutions of recent times" from the English Civil War up to the 1848 outbursts, but particularly embodied in the "prior [*bisherigen*] historical experience ... of France since 1789." But it was now clear that this represented a characteristically "bourgeois" model of revolution, and that the proletarian revolution would take place on wholly different grounds. Accordingly, in place of an abstract, philosophical conception of "revolution," scientific socialism had to unearth its economic principles. Here, the necessary objective material was forthcoming: "History has ... made it clear, that the state of economic development on the Continent [in 1848] ... was not ripe for the abolition of capitalist production."²⁹²

There had, however, been an "economic revolution ... since 1848," which had brought industrial-capitalist development across Europe, and had made "Germany ... an industrial nation of the highest order," widening the geographical range of class struggles, and ensuring that the "evangelical sects" of utopian socialism were now usurped by the "sharply-formulated theory of Marx." In short, from the "masses" "separated and differentiated by locality and nationality," the working class now represented a "powerful army of the proletariat," a "great international army of socialists ... daily growing in number, organization, discipline, insight, and confidence in victory."²⁹³ The militaristic tone of this argument was not merely rhetorical. For Engels, one of the main aspects or manifestations of the "economic revolution" in Europe

²⁹² Engels, "Einleitung"; 512-15.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 515.

was a “total transformation [*Umwälzung*] in the whole nature of war,” both in terms of mass conscription and weapon technology, and prompted in particular by the “German-French war” of 1870.²⁹⁴ The political implications of this transformation – one of several “revolutions from above” that arose during the period of capitalist maturation, also including Bismarck’s unification of Germany²⁹⁵ – were the basis of Engels’ arguments concerning SPD tactics.

First of all, the effects of conscription and military expenditure upon taxation had driven “the poorer classes of people [*Volksklassen*] into the arms of socialism.” This had primarily occurred in Germany rather than France, where workers’ politics was demoralized by the defeat of the Paris Commune in 1871. The SPD had thus emerged as “the strongest, most disciplined, and most rapidly growing socialist party,” by converting popular (economic) dissatisfaction into a series of “astonishing” electoral results; and this success had demonstrated the possible “utilization of universal suffrage” as a “new mode of struggle for the proletariat.”²⁹⁶ Secondly, the advancements in state-military technology – not only weaponry, but also transportation and urban design – coupled with the fact that the interests of the bourgeoisie were no longer aligned with the revolutionary workers, meant that the forces of state repression would hold an overwhelming advantage in any situation of outright revolutionary street-fighting.²⁹⁷

For these reasons, “rebellion of the old style, street-fighting with barricades ... was largely antiquated [*veraltet*].”²⁹⁸ Instead, it was now time to heed “the German example of the use of suffrage rights,” and thus to focus on the “slow work of propaganda and parliamentary activity.”²⁹⁹ The new model for revolutionary action was not the storming of the Bastille but German Social Democracy, the “most numerous, most compact mass [*Masse*] ... of the international proletarian army,” whose “growth proceeds as spontaneously, as steadily, as

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 517.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 516.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 518-19.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 521-22.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 519.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 523.

irresistibly, and at the same time as tranquilly as a natural process [*Naturprozeß*].”³⁰⁰ The continuation of this growth, Engels argued, would ultimately bring proletarian forces to a level “over the heads of the ruling governmental system,” and he therefore counselled against being drawn into a premature street battle whilst forces were still stacked against them, which would interrupt or delay its “natural” growth through unnecessary sacrifices.³⁰¹ In summary, the second section of Engels’ 1895 foreword would seem to have substituted Marx’s expectation of imminent proletarian revolution in the wake of 1848, with a new expectation of gradual proletarian revolution in the wake of the 1893 German federal elections (where the SPD received just under a quarter of the popular vote). This new expectation was underlain by what I have called the explicit logic of “scientific socialism.” In other words, its historical standpoint was no longer rooted in bourgeois conceptuality (in this context, the “classical” model of revolution), but rather in objective economic facts, which the development of capitalism since 1848 had validated, and which meant that the workers’ movement was increasingly receptive to Marx’s theory, as utopian sects became discredited and died out.

As already outlined, the second part of Engels’ foreword asserted that an “economic revolution” since 1848 had led to two decisive advancements within the socialist movement: on one hand, the “sharply formulated theory of Marx” had taken the place of various utopian doctrines, and, on the other, a mass of localized struggles had become “*one* great international army of socialists” endowed with “organization, discipline, insight.” It is clear how “pronounc[ing] the formula” of a shared programme for workers’ parties was a major way in which the former development contributed to the latter. However, we previously framed these developments as the consequence of an objective clarification in industrial-capitalist conditions; it was the increasing “clarity” of “class relations” that had led the workers to gain insight and

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 524.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 525.

therefore become receptive to Marx's theory. In other words, as the workers became proletarianized, they increasingly recognized the truth of Marx's conception of "proletarian revolution." (At this moment, the mediating structure of the "workers' party" was elided in Engels' analysis.) The clear formulation of Marx's theory, however "sharp," could not affect the conditions of its reception, and had to await the broader clarification of proletarian consciousness.

What the first part of Engels' foreword had established, however, was that Marx's *Tagesgeschichte* was able to pronounce the programmatic "formula" of workers' socialism, ahead of the time when they became objectively necessary (for the purposes of Social Democracy) due to the economic development of the proletariat. This might suggest the argument that, thanks to Marx's unique insight into capitalist society, he was able to provide a useful propaganda tool to socialist workers' parties – a formula that could bring workers into the socialist fold, before they had become "naturally" proletarianized by economic fact. More broadly, it meant that "scientific" theoretical insight could react in a timely fashion to contemporary political events, without the need for a comprehensive collation of data or a period of analytical reflection. It was perhaps on the basis of these propagandistic qualities of the Marxist programme that, when increased military expenditure raised taxation, "the poorer classes of people [*Volksklassen*]" were driven directly "into the arms of socialism," without having to first achieve "proletarian" consciousness.

The significance of Marx's *Tagesgeschichte* for Engels' argument can be viewed in terms of the formal analogy between "revolutionary writing" and the "proletarian movement" at the level of self-consciousness – that is, consciousness of underlying laws governing historical action, and their necessary application to one's own historical activity. Due to this self-consciousness, Marx had recognized – in writing *Class Struggles* – the possibility of error, and therefore "himself instituted" a test of its conclusions through subsequent analyses; as we

have seen, he then found that there “very little to change” in his “written representation [geschriebene Darstellung]” of the period in question.³⁰² If the same conclusions were then stated in a party programme, a similar “test” could perhaps be instituted – but, in this case, the validation would be practical rather than theoretical. The primary benefit of the party programme being explicitly stated in the “scientific” terms of Marxist theory, rather than in an eclectic or utopian form – even if the demand can be boiled down to the same point – was therefore to allow for this retrospective validation (which, of course, only the objective truth of Marxism could expect to receive). The last of the qualities that Engels identified in the “great international army of socialists” must be reiterated: *Siegesgewißheit*, confidence or secure knowledge of victory. Only the *form* of Marxist writing could provide this: it was not writing ahead of time in itself that had propaganda value if addressed to the workers; it was rather the retrospective confirmation of the past representation that could foster a kind of assurance rooted in self-consciousness.

In light of this interpretive hypothesis, we can closely examine Engels’ argument for the usefulness of universal suffrage as an instrument of the revolutionary movement:

[E]ven if universal suffrage had offered no other benefit, than to allow us to count ourselves every three years; that by the regularly established, unexpectedly rapid rise in the number of votes it increased ... the workers’ confidence of victory [*Siegesgewißheit*] and the terror of their enemies, and so became our best means of propaganda; [and] that it accurately informed us concerning our own strength ... then it would still have been more than enough. ... But it has done much more. In electoral agitation it

³⁰² Ibid., 511.

provided us with a means [*Mittel*] ... to come into contact with
the popular masses [*Volksmassen*] ...³⁰³

The first part of this passage, describing the minimum benefit of using universal suffrage, showed how the objective growth of workers' politics due to industrial-capitalist maturation could in itself generate "victory-assurance" and propagandistic value. As I will now attempt to show, it was in relation to the additional task of addressing the "popular masses" through electoral campaigning that the same structure of regular, retrospective confirmation taking place at the level of theory – embodied by the self-tested confidence of Marx's *Tagesgeschichte* – could generate the same kind of benefits.

Here a final complexity must be brought into account. The term "people" (*Volk*) played a defining role in Engels' text, not only as the notional audience of parliamentary debate, but as a concept tied to the classical, bourgeois model of revolution. This model, Engels argued, emanated from situations in which a "popular mass [*Volksmasse*]," incorporating both bourgeois and proletarian elements, sought to overthrow a "small ... ruling minority." However, because these revolutions had all replaced one regime of class rule with another, they were all effectively "minority revolutions," led by particular classes that merely took on "the appearance of being the representative of the whole people." By 1848, this notion of the "people" had become, at least in principle, a source of political illusions, including for Marx and Engels themselves. Engels emphasized that they had not fallen into the same error as the representatives of "vulgar democracy" (*Vulgardemokratie*, a counterpart to *Vulgarökonomie*, by which the orthodox Marxists referred to bourgeois political economy), who hoped for the "triumph of the 'people'" as an outcome to revolution. Marx and Engels already rejected this idea in principle, expecting "antagonistic elements" to emerge within the revolutionary

³⁰³ Ibid., 519.

“people,” and thus for the proletariat to emerge as a revolutionary force. Their illusion, particularly encouraged by promising developments in Paris, was rather that this proletarian autonomy from bourgeois elements of the “people” could be realized in an “instinctive” manner – simply a matter of extending the scale of the classical “minority revolution” to that of a “revolution of the majority.”³⁰⁴ (In other words, the problem of consciousness, especially as posed by Engels in *Feuerbach* as a problem of “acting masses and their leaders,” had not yet been brought into account.)

Again, the explicit argument that followed was that the “economic revolution” of capitalist maturation had resolved this problem since 1848, by clarifying the objective basis of the proletariat. However, we can now identify an additional dimension of the problem. It was precisely the bourgeois “form” of revolution, and the accompanying concept of the “people,” that had given the barricade its revolutionary efficacy. For Engels, the barricade was essentially a tactic of “passive defence,” whose main benefit was “to shake the firmness of the military” by withstanding it. “Even in the classical time of street fighting, the barricade therefore produced more of a moral than a material effect.” This “moral” effect would no longer pertain once the bourgeoisie had established its rule over society, and would therefore oppose the proletarian revolution:

An insurrection with which all sections of the people
[*Volksschichten*] sympathize, will hardly recur; in the class
struggle all the middle sections will never group themselves
round the proletariat so exclusively that the reactionary parties

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 513-15.

gathered round the bourgeoisie well-nigh disappear. The “people,”
therefore, will always appear divided ...³⁰⁵

The spell of the “people” was broken: “the soldier no longer sees ‘the people’ behind [the barricade], but rather rebels ... , the outcasts of society.” The moral effect of the barricade, or its capacity to fuse individual wills into a mass action, had been extinguished.³⁰⁶

The usual reading of Engels’ foreword would suggest that, in place of the “moral” effect of the barricade, he conceived a path to revolution that was objectively guaranteed by the “material” economic situation. However, the element of “victory-assurance” as “propaganda-medium” can be regarded as a direct analogue of the barricade’s “moral” dimension in the context of universal suffrage – a means through which the revolutionary movement could rally itself, and cultivate the “terror of their enemies.” Whilst the numerical growth of the SPD alone might create such a sense of confidence amongst German socialists. But how could it be assured that this would ultimately issue in a proletarian revolution, when the party still addressed its propaganda to the “great mass of people”? And how could the exemplary success of the German party foster an equal degree of moral confidence across European nations whose socialist workers’ parties were at an earlier stage of development? Here the theoretical barricade of Marxist writing became crucial: a programmatic statement of the proletarian’s political demands, and a clear point of differentiation from all bourgeois-democratic strata, that would gather moral force as it was increasingly confirmed by economic developments. It was for this reason that Marxist politics had required the writing of *Tagesgeschichte*, to set down an initial mark before it was simply confirmed by the facts.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 521-22.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 520-21.

To conclude, we can reconsider Engels' statement that the steady growth of German Social Democracy was "like a natural process," which could be expected to continue. This expectation had seemed to crystallize the perceived objectivity of Marxist "scientific socialism" into a deterministic faith in the revolutionary outcome of parliamentary socialist struggle. We can now see that this hard materialist logic was supplemented, and to some degree undercut, by a "moral" layer of significance. By *writing* that the growth of Social Democracy was akin to a natural process, because it was linked to objective capitalist development and the formation of the proletariat, Engels was setting down a marker whose confirmation by subsequent events would have the propaganda force of a proletarian barricade.

We can make a final return to *Evolution*, specifically to the preface of its first German edition in 1882. Here Engels described the problems of adapting the "purely scientific work" of *Anti-Dühring* into a piece of "immediate popular propaganda [*Volkspropaganda*]." However, he concluded that the text would, in fact, "create few difficulties for the German workers"; it was rather the purportedly "'sophisticated' bourgeois" who might confront problems of understanding. At the level of "content," this was because Engels' argument related more closely to the "general life-conditions" of the workers. At the level of "form," however, the difference was a moral one. The "schoolmaster of the German bourgeoisie," mired in "eclecticism" and characteristically dismissive of the Hegelian "dialectic," might be troubled by an argument that linked the "evolutionary history of socialism" to both Darwinian natural science and Hegelian philosophy. By contrast, "we German socialists are proud, that we descend not only from Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Owen, but also from Kant, Fichte, and Hegel."³⁰⁷ The very readability of Engels' Marxist writing would barricade workers' socialism against bourgeois eclecticism, channelling the objective life-conditions of the workers into a "proud" and self-conscious movement, whilst disorienting and demoralizing their enemies.

³⁰⁷ Engels, "Entwicklung"; 186-88.

The formation of German orthodox Marxism can be summarized as the gradual development of two doctrinal motifs that each formed a bridge between the writing of Marxist theory and the political activity of the SPD. Firstly, Marx's dialectical theory was conceived as a basis for comprehending the signs of modern social development, which were increasingly visible to the "people" but in a chaotic or contradictory guise. Marxist theory was therefore useful for the SPD not only as a "workers' party," but also for its general participation in public, party-political discourse. In Kautsky's *Erfurt* commentary, this became the driving force behind proletarian development, conceived in terms of cultural enlightenment. Secondly, the SPD's particular modes of writing – the party programme and its popularized literature – were conceived as the appropriate platform or vehicle for Marxist theory to address the proletariat and thereby enact its revolutionary mission. This was not simply a matter of disseminating a set of explicit theoretical principles, but one of actively generating and propagating the Marxist viewpoint (historical materialism). In this light, Engels' 1895 foreword can be read as an authoritative confirmation that the Marxist party programme had taken up the propagandistic functions of the *Communist Manifesto*. These motifs, rather than the iron "necessity" of revolutionary determinism, were the defining elements of Marxist "scientific socialism" *as a textual-political production*. This doctrinal structure had one major implication that must be underlined: they entailed that the "clarification" of proletarian consciousness did *not* have to occur through the classical path of an increasing homogeneity of capitalist conditions aligned to the widening political unity of the workers' movement. All that was required was the increasing *visibility* of dialectical social development aligned to the widening political *dissemination* of the Marxist party programme, a combination that would provide the initial

spur to bring the “people” into Social Democracy, within which a full theoretical consciousness of capitalism would develop (once the “people” did their Marxist homework).

III

The formation of French revolutionary syndicalism

This chapter will analyze the doctrinal formation of French revolutionary syndicalism, which culminated in the CGT's ratification of the "Amiens Charter" in 1906. Two factors played a key role in this development: firstly, a general turn towards syndical activity amongst a significant set of French anarchists; secondly, the growth of the French syndical movement itself into an autonomous political force. This does not mean that anarchism was the exclusive ideological influence upon revolutionary syndicalism; however, the entry of anarchists into the syndical movement was an essential historical condition for the emergence of Amiens doctrine. Jean Maitron provides a useful overview of this formative process. Firstly, "from around 1892 to 1902," a number of "anarchist militants ... consecrated all their efforts towards syndical work. Anarchist ideology thus found a field of application within a milieu that it had long disdained, and which [now] revealed itself to be particularly favourable." Subsequently, in the period leading up to Amiens, these anarchists played a leading role in the creation of "a new doctrine, revolutionary syndicalism, which was above all an active practice [*une pratique d'action*]," closely tied to the "revolutionary and anti-authoritarian" activity of the emergent CGT.³⁰⁸ These two stages of formation have been linked to the work of two individuals in particular: the practical application of anarchism in a syndical milieu is primarily attributed to FBT secretary Fernand Pelloutier; the formulation of revolutionary syndicalism as a self-contained doctrine is primarily attributed to CGT vice-secretary Émile Pouget.

In the case of German orthodox Marxism, I traced the development of a textual synthesis between "ideological" and "institutional" phenomena of a relatively fixed and

³⁰⁸ Jean Maitron, *Le mouvement anarchiste en France* [vol. 1, "Des origines à 1914"] (Paris: Maspero, 1975), 330.

definite nature: the theoretical canon of Marx(ism) and the German Social Democratic party. The nature of the synthesis itself was more plastic, unfolding as a series of inventive literary-political productions by a close coterie of thinkers, under the influence of changing historical circumstances. In the case of French revolutionary syndicalism, the “ideological” and “institutional” bases were much more flexible. On one hand, although the syndicalists were strongly influenced by anarchism, the very nature of this standpoint was resistant to codification and celebrated individuality of thought – it constituted a literary milieu more than a doctrinal canon. On the other, the institutional nature of the French syndical movement, especially its relationship to the French Socialists, underwent fundamental transformations during the period in question – partly under the influence of the revolutionary syndicalists themselves, as they wrested control of the CGT and pushed it in an “autonomous” direction. This might seem to leave my analysis of the textual synthesis between these phenomena in a state of continual flux. However, in this case, we can assign fixed parameters to the nature of the “synthesis” itself, by linking it to the unique political-historical origins of French revolutionary syndicalism. In this way, it can be defined as a literary-political project with specific aims and premises, for which it was necessary to fashion the malleable phenomena of anarchist doctrine and syndical organization into particular, convergent forms.

In 1884, a law was introduced by Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau, Interior Minister of Jules Ferry’s republican government, allowing “*syndicats* or professional associations” to be “freely constituted, without the authorization of government,” on the condition that they were “exclusively” devoted to “the study and defence of economic, industrial, commercial, and agricultural interests.” For this purpose, they were permitted to maintain “special funds for mutual aid,” to establish “libraries” and “courses of professional instruction,” and to create

“information offices” for the listing of employment opportunities.³⁰⁹ In a subsequent “ministerial circular,” Waldeck-Rousseau stated that the “dominant thought” behind the law was “to develop the spirit of association amongst the workers,” based on the principle that “the association of individuals according to their professional affinities is ... an instrument of material, moral, and intellectual progress” rather than “a weapon of combat.” The essential condition for this legal operation of the *syndicats* was the “publicity” of their statutes and activities, which provided “the only possible guarantee for observation of [the] condition required by the law: the professional character of the association.” What remained “punishable” under existing legislation were any actions “using violence, assaults, threats, or fraudulent manoeuvres” to “bring about or maintain a concerted cessation of work with the aim of forcing the increase ... of salaries, or to obstruct the free exercise of industry and labour.”³¹⁰ This was a characteristic piece of “radical bourgeois” reformist legislation in late-nineteenth century France, broadly inspired by the vision of a “materially productive and scientifically enlightened” “republican moral order,” to be established primarily through “education.”³¹¹ (This liberal vision of the syndical movement as a force of social progress also manifested in a strand of contemporary academic thought, such as in the work of the “solidarist” legal scholar Léon Duguit.³¹²)

The attitude of the revolutionary syndicalists towards this law would seem to be straightforward. Their vision of workers’ struggle was predicated upon “direct action” against capitalist employers through strikes, boycotts, and sabotage, culminating in a revolutionary general strike that would bring down the capitalist state – in short, pushing syndicalist activity

³⁰⁹ “Loi sur les syndicats professionnels (du 21 mars 1884)”; [“Documents complémentaires [annex],”] Fernand Pelloutier, *Histoire des Bourses du travail* (Paris: Costes, 1921), 266-68.

³¹⁰ [Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau,] “Circulaire ministérielle relative aux Syndicats professionnels (25 août 1884)”; *ibid.*, 271-76.

³¹¹ Katherine Auspitz, *The Radical Bourgeoisie* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 20.

³¹² See: JES Hayward, “Solidarist Syndicalism: Durkheim and Duguit”; *The Sociological Review* 8.1 (July 1960), 17-36; 8.2 (December 1960), 185-202.

decisively beyond the law. Unsurprisingly, they looked favourably upon “*syndicats* refractory to the law,” which “neglected to deposit [their] statutes and the names of administrators” with the relevant authorities.³¹³ However, this explicit hostility to the *loi Waldeck-Rousseau* was underlain by a more complex ideological structure. Unquestionably, the law was the essential condition and root cause of the syndical movement’s existence on a national, mass-organizational scale. If the revolutionary syndicalists were to realize their ultimate vision, their practical starting point would have to be the *syndicats* created in accordance with the law. Furthermore, they were by no means opposed to the idea that the “freely constituted ... association” of workers for the “study and defence of economic ... interests” could be a source “material, moral, and intellectual progress”; indeed, this is virtually a definition of the revolutionary syndicalist standpoint. However, all of these terms were given a radically-new significance in syndicalist discourse, on the basis that they could *only* be realized by using the syndical movement as a “weapon of combat,” through the “cessation of work” or even with an element of “violence,” against the decadent and parasitical bourgeois-capitalist regime. Thus, the revolutionary syndicalists did not simply counterpose an illegal model of trade-unionist activity to Waldeck-Rousseau’s legal conception, but sought to establish that the proscribed practices of “direct action” were in fact legitimate and indeed necessary for the realization of Waldeck-Rousseau’s own liberal-republican social aims; in this sense, they turned the law of bourgeois-capitalist society against itself.

In this framework, we can comprehend the textual synthesis of ideology and institutionality in French revolutionary syndicalist writing. The militant, anti-Statist vision of syndicalism operating “beyond the law” is generally linked to the anarchist background of many leading syndicalists. However, the application of anarchist theory to syndical practice did not simply entail an ideal representation that could be held up as an attractive possibility

³¹³ Pouget, “Le syndicat”; *L’action directe*, 113.

for the *syndicats* to adopt. As already suggested, the revolutionary syndicalists believed that what might be regarded as their “anarchist” conception of syndical activity was no more than the ultimate extension or realization of the sociopolitical mission inherent to its existing, constitutional form – and, in particular, to the “spirit of association” that it already fostered amongst the workers. It was this subversive extension of syndicalist legality that allowed revolutionary syndicalist doctrine to be articulated in a *programmatic* rather than an idealistic or utopian form. The central argument of the “Amiens Charter” was, after all, that the “quotidian revendicatory work” of syndicalism, the “co-ordination” of workers in pursuit of “immediate ameliorations,” was organically linked to its “future” task of “integral emancipation” and “capitalist expropriation” through the “general strike”: “the *syndicat*, today a grouping of resistance, will in the future be the grouping of production and redistribution, the base of social reorganization.”³¹⁴ It was therefore necessary to close the gap between the “anarchist” ideal and the immediate reality of the syndical movement *at the level of ideological representation*.

We can consider the two main themes of syndicalist “theory” in this light: firstly, the *present* mode of syndicalist organization; secondly, the *future* goal of a revolutionary “general strike.” With regard to immediate organization, the revolutionary syndicalists’ emphasis upon federalist association as a platform for individual initiative and “direct action” was clearly anarchist in provenance, and occasionally acknowledged as such. However, this vision was never represented as a straightforward application of anarchist doctrine to the syndical domain. Rather, syndicalist doctrine entailed a *socialization* of anarchism, framing anarchist principles as an organic expression of the workers’ own “material, moral, and intellectual progress” and solidaristic “spirit of association.” “Syndicalism” was thus, in effect, an organic form of “anarchism” emanating from the workers themselves, ultimately rooted in the in-built social

³¹⁴ [CGT, “Charte d’Amiens.”]

tendencies of the *syndicats* – a crucial differentiation from “pure” anarchist doctrine. With regard to the general strike, syndicalist discussions did not simply represent it as an ideal goal, but rather sought to establish how this ultimate destination could be reached through a *generalization* of syndical action in its existing form. This chiefly entailed the extension of localized or partial struggles (confined to a particular workplace or *métier*) into a social struggle of the workers as an entire class against capitalist exploitation – or, a transition from “professional” to “proletarian” struggle (in a sense informed by the Proudhonian theory outlined above). In summary, French revolutionary syndicalism was built around a pair of textual-political operations – the “socialization” of anarchist theory and the “generalization” of syndical practice – that brought its ideological and institutional bases towards a “proletarian” synthesis. Both operations were rooted in a sociopolitical logic that aimed to subvert the bourgeois-republican terms of the *loi Waldeck-Rousseau*, and converged in the notion of “direct action,” the catch-all syndicalist formula for a range of actions that began with organizational autonomy and culminated in the general strike.

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The inaugural text of revolutionary syndicalism is often identified as Pelloutier’s 1895 article “Anarchism and the labour *syndicats*,” which appeared in Jean Grave’s anarchist newspaper *Les Temps nouveaux*. Pelloutier asserted that the syndical movement, formerly disdained by “libertarian socialists” (anarchists) due of the heavy involvement of “parliamentary socialists,” had altered in nature: they had escaped the authoritarian “influence of collectivist politicians,” and increasingly constituted themselves through “free association” and “free accord”; they were consequently “in a state to hear, study, and receive libertarian doctrines,” and thus to

become “a practical school of anarchism,” ultimately preparing for the social revolution.³¹⁵ Maitron has framed this text as the main expression of a broader tendency, as a significant number of anarchists turned towards syndicalism in the 1890s following governmental repression and the apparent failure of their individualistic tactics (such as terroristic “propaganda of the deed”). For all but the “pure individualists,” the *syndicats* “appeared as the ideal means of gaining the working mass to the anarchist cause and to prepare the social revolution.”³¹⁶ This tendency included anarchists such as Grave, who saw syndicalism as one of many potential ways of placing anarchist struggle on firmer social foundations, but felt that “it would be dangerous to view syndicalism as the sole revolutionary means.”³¹⁷ In this light, the initial wave of revolutionary syndicalists might be seen as those converted anarchists who were sufficiently convinced by the practical possibilities of the syndical movement that it became the exclusive focus of their activity.

However, in the case of Pelloutier at least, a much more complex process was at work. It should be noted, first of all, that Pelloutier’s “anarchist” identity was not a firm one, and only adopted once he was already involved in the *Fédération des Bourses du travail* (from the beginning of 1894, becoming FBT secretary the following year). His “anarchism” is therefore not easily separable from his propagandistic strategy of calling upon anarchists to join the syndical movement – in other words, his attempt to synthesize anarchist theory and syndical practice. Placing this strategy in the context of Pelloutier’s overall political trajectory, it becomes clear why he can be regarded as the originator of the syndicalist “politics of direct action,” not only in the sense that (as several historians have noted) he formulated many of its key themes and ideas, placing them into a theoretical ensemble without yet unifying them conceptually,³¹⁸ but also in terms of founding its two-pronged “literary-political” strategy.

³¹⁵ Fernand Pelloutier, “L’anarchisme et les syndicats ouvriers”; *FP*, 404-05.

³¹⁶ Maitron, *Mouvement anarchiste* [vol. 1], 279.

³¹⁷ Jean Grave, *Le syndicalisme dans l’évolution sociale* (Paris: Temps nouveaux, 1908), 8.

³¹⁸ See: Julliard, *Pelloutier*, 214-27; Jennings, *Syndicalism in France*, 22-24.

We can roughly distinguish three broad, overlapping phases in Pelloutier's theoretical writing: firstly, advocating the "general strike," between 1892 and 1895; secondly, addressing the so-called "social question" from an anarchistic perspective, between 1894 and 1898; finally, elucidating the revolutionary role of the *Bourses du travail* between 1897 and 1901. Each of these stages entailed a direct (and at times explicit) attempt to subvert the *loi Waldeck-Rousseau* through the activity of the *Bourses du travail*, and gave rise to the twinned textual strategies of anarchist "socialization" and syndical "generalization" towards a "proletarian" meeting-point.

Pelloutier's first writings on syndical activity appeared in 1892, when he was editor of the republican-socialist Saint-Nazaire newspaper *La Démocratie de l'Ouest*, and involved in Jules Guesde's Marxian *Parti ouvrier* (whose programme was invoked by Engels in his 1895 foreword). He initially advocated the "general strike" as a means of radicalizing the existing forms of socialist struggle – most notably, in a motion submitted to a regional socialist congress at Tours (September 1892), and an open letter addressed to Guesde (October 1892). (At this time, the general strike was not strongly associated with a particular ideological standpoint, and was discussed as a practical possibility by both socialists and anarchists.) For Pelloutier, neither gradual reform nor revolutionary insurrection were viable paths to "economic liberty"; on one hand, socialist "appeals" for democratic reform could never overcome the fundamental opposition between capital and labour; on the other, "bloody revolutions" of the past had harmed the workers much more than the bourgeoisie. Thus he proposed the "general strike" – defined as "the universal and simultaneous suspension of productive force" – as an essential socialist tactic: "amongst the legal and pacific means unwittingly accorded to the workers' party," it was the "one [means] that must hasten economic transformation and would assure ... the success of the fourth Estate [the proletariat]." ³¹⁹ Here we see the element of *legal*

³¹⁹ Fernand Pelloutier, "Résolution votée le 4 septembre 1892"; 306-07.

subversion was introduced into Pelloutier's political vision as a kind of middle path between the "reformist" and "revolutionary" extremes of existing socialist strategy.

A closer look can be taken at Pelloutier's initial vision of the general strike. The Tours motion began by stating that the "formidable social organization" at the disposal of the "ruling class" had rendered the established strategies of "socialist democracy" as "powerless and vain." On one hand, neither "purportedly-liberal legislation" nor socialist "appeals" to the "authorities" for reform could have any substantive effect in a society shaped by the fundamental "opposition of interests" between "capital and salariat." Only a "revolution" establishing "economic liberty" based on the "principles ... of natural right" could emancipate the workers from capitalist oppression. In short, Pelloutier posited *natural economic justice* as an antidote to the injustices of bourgeois society. On the other hand, however, the path of outright "insurrection" was an inherently counter-productive strategy. "[B]loody revolutions" generally hurt the workers more than the "bourgeoisie," especially considering the preponderant "military power at the service of capital." Between the extremes of reformism and insurrectionism, Pelloutier thus proposed the "general strike" – defined as "the universal and simultaneous suspension of productive force" – as an essential socialist tactic.

Pelloutier's letter to Guesde developed this argumentation in a significant direction. Whilst the "pacific" general strike was again distinguished from the "dangerous" and counter-productive strategy of "insurrection," the other side of the argument – the need to move beyond legislative reform towards an economic revolution – was adjusted to specifically oppose Guesde's use of "universal suffrage." Unlike socialist "appeals" for legislative reform, Pelloutier conceded that the use of suffrage could, in principle, engender a transformation of bourgeois society. Pelloutier's main argument was that the path to "revolution" through

suffrage was too gradual, taking “fifty years” in the best possible case. During this time, the unnecessary suffering of the workers would continue:

All those who, armed for the social battle like us, ... succumb
nonetheless in a year, in six months, [or] perhaps tomorrow to the
combined efforts of the capitalist army, [and] those who suffer ...
from not being able to use the arms or brain given to them by
Nature, call for a more rapid transformation of the social order

Pelloutier’s argument was not simply that a social transformation was urgently required to ameliorate present suffering, but also that the gradualist approach to revolution was not making full use of the *natural labour-capacity* already at its disposal for the “social battle.” Whereas parliamentary struggle had to wait upon and proceed at the same pace as the “political education of the people,” the general strike could bring the workers into direct anti-capitalist struggle and thus actively contribute to this education. Accordingly, Pelloutier defined the general strike as the “apotheosis of productive force,” which made it the ideal weapon for “the workers themselves” to combat the “parasites of labour”; it was the antithesis of a society in which “money” had become the “regulator of the economic order.”³²⁰

Pelloutier’s initial conception of the general strike thus conjoined two distinct lines of argument through the concept of “productive force.” In the Tours motion, the general strike as a “suspension” of productive force was presented as a “legal and pacific” means of securing *natural economic justice* against a “social organization” in the hands of the capitalist bourgeoisie. In the letter to Guesde, the general strike as the “apotheosis” of productive force was presented as a means of directly exerting the *natural physical and mental capacities of the*

³²⁰ Fernand Pelloutier, “Lettre ouverte au citoyen Jules Guesde [1892]”; *FP*, 312-13.

workers towards revolutionary ends, rather than awaiting the gradual development of suffrage agitation. The *legitimacy* (natural justice) and *efficacy* (natural capacity) of the “general strike” (as a form of proletarian revolution) were thus rooted in the same underlying factor: the “productive force” of labour.

This dual argument corresponded to a two-sided conception of the “bourgeoisie”: on one hand, as the *ruling social class* with control of the state, law, and military; on the other, as a *parasitical class* whose wealth relied upon the abstraction of monetary value from productive labour. Pelloutier’s conception of the “general strike” opposed both of these aspects of the bourgeoisie – but arguably did so in a “reversed” order. One might expect that the social dominance of the bourgeoisie would be opposed by the natural physical and intellectual power of the workers (thus establishing that the proletariat has the *capacity* to overthrow bourgeois rule), whilst bourgeois parasitism and luxury would be opposed by natural economic justice (thus establishing that the proletariat has the legitimate *right* to overthrow the bourgeoisie). However, in the previously-cited texts, Pelloutier seemed to switch these arguments – a manoeuvre facilitated by the concept of “productive force,” in which proletarian “legitimacy” and “efficacy” were inseparably merged.

In the Tours motion, the bourgeoisie’s control of the “social organization” was counterposed by economic “natural right,” which the general strike would establish by turning the bourgeois legal order against its own creators. Thus, Pelloutier did not directly oppose the revolutionary force of the proletariat to the reactionary force of the bourgeoisie; instead, the general strike would exploit a kind of loophole within bourgeois legality, avoiding an outright and “bloody” conflict. The implicit principle of this argument was that (as Pelloutier wrote elsewhere) “the laws of progress are superior to all human legislation”;³²¹ the bourgeoisie could not rule society by law without “unwittingly” providing a legal means for the workers to

³²¹ Fernand Pelloutier & Aristide Briand, “De la révolution par la grève générale [c. 1892]”; *FP*, 298.

counteract bourgeois injustices in turn. In this sense, the feasibility of proletarian revolution was linked to rational social progress rather than the objective resources of the proletariat.

In the letter to Guesde, bourgeois parasitism (epitomized by the “money” economy) was counterposed by the natural muscular and intellectual power of the workers, which the general strike would bring into immediate revolutionary effect. Thus, the contrast between parasitical bourgeoisie and productive proletariat was not merely a moral comparison providing legitimacy for the proletarian revolution, but was primarily framed as a matter of *efficacy*. Universal suffrage was limited by its failure to make full use of the workers’ immediate productive force, leaving it beholden to the gradual “political education of the people”; consequently, suffrage would not necessarily be able to “eliminate money” and the “social troubles” that it engendered. The implicit principle here was that (as Pelloutier wrote elsewhere) “action is the law of progress,” particularly as a source of revolutionary “education.”³²² In this connection, economic parasitism was significant precisely because it provided an immediate pretext (as an image of the “bourgeois” enemy) for proletarian-revolutionary action through the general strike.

In summary, the concept of “productive force” allowed Pelloutier to present an argument for the “general strike” that did not straightforwardly establish either its objective feasibility or its legitimacy as a form of proletarian revolution, but intertwined these arguments in a distinctive fashion – resulting in a principle of ineluctable social progress on one hand, and a principle of revolutionary acceleration on the other.

The theoretical premises of this tactical vision were elaborated in an unpublished manuscript “Of Revolution through the General Strike” (1892), co-authored with the socialist Aristide Briand. Jacques Julliard views the “juridico-subversive” argument through which this text

³²² Ibid., 303.

established the legality of the general strike (by defining “productive force” as the “property” of labourers, which they therefore had a legal right to suspend) as something of an oddity, perhaps attributable to Briand, which would have a limited influence upon Pelloutier’s later standpoint.³²³ However, I have already suggested that precisely such an argument was an essential condition of “French revolutionary syndicalist” discourse. Two facets of the manuscript are significant in this light. Firstly, its “legal” argument was explicitly directed towards the *loi Waldeck-Rousseau* – suggesting that since it sanctioned the association of workers for “the defence of their economic interests,” and since workers had a legitimate “natural right” to suspend their “productive force,” the law effectively permitted the use of a general “cessation of labour” to demand a “more just redistribution of property.”³²⁴ Secondly, the text’s overall argument linked the general strike tactic to the *Bourses du travail*, which were thus described as “the most powerful weapon that the governments, pressed from all angles by proletarian expansion, have been able to accord to the fourth Estate” (again, turning the bourgeois-republican legal order against itself).³²⁵ As the “synthesis of the syndical movement,” the *Bourses* would constitute a “gigantic federation” of “workers’ associations,” whose primary task would be “to develop the principle and necessity of the general strike.”³²⁶ In 1892, Pelloutier did not link this syndicalist vision to anarchist ideals, but rather couched it as the next logical step of socialist workers’ struggle – specifically, to move beyond the international May Day protests (inaugurated in 1890), which had become the focal point of Guesdist activity.³²⁷ For Pelloutier and Briand, this had been the “most imposing protest in favour of the emancipation of the proletariat” in history, but its lack of concrete results had shown it to be

³²³ Julliard, *Pelloutier*, 87.

³²⁴ Pelloutier & Briand, “De la révolution”; 290-91.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 283.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 297-99.

³²⁷ In the preface to an 1891 pamphlet on May Day, Guesde called upon workers to participate in the next “international appeal of your class,” stating that: “This pacific manifestation will suffice for your victory, [as] no government can resist for long against the millions of workers standing up and declaring: *we demand!*” (JB Coriolan & J Mortair, *Le premier mai et la journée de huit heures* (Paris: Crépin, 1891), [unpaginated]).

an “illusion” that “the bourgeoisie ... would listen” even to moderate demands for reform.³²⁸ Thus, a more subversive mode of proletarian struggle was necessary – but without lapsing back into counter-productive forms of insurrection.

Pelloutier’s socialist argument for the general strike was rejected by the Guesdists, leading to his disillusionment with parliamentary socialism. This was reflected in his next major discussion of the tactic, the 1895 pamphlet *What is the General Strike?* (co-signed by the syndicalist Henri Girard, but generally attributed solely to Pelloutier), which carried the sub-heading of “Lesson given by a worker to the doctors of socialism.”³²⁹ The text was presented as a dialogue between a set of workers, one of whom successfully convinces the others that the general strike was the only viable means to combat their employers; clearly, Pelloutier’s syndicalist vision was no longer tied to socialist organization, but rather implied an autonomous form of workers’ resistance. Accordingly, the general strike was defined not as a tactic to be propagated by the socialist movement, but as a *generalization* of localized strike activity; Pelloutier noted “a more and more pronounced tendency to generalize the stoppage of work, because it is perceived that modest strikes do not achieve anything at all.” As such, it was “absurd” to consider “organiz[ing] the general strike,” beyond “propaganda” work to ensure that the workers would be “ready” if it were to break out.³³⁰ One aspect of syndicalist “direct action” was thus already in place.

Existing accounts have emphasized the transformation in Pelloutier’s conception of the general strike from 1892 to 1895.³³¹ Previously conceived as a “legal and pacific” weapon operating between reform and revolution, it was now explicitly stated that the “general strike will not be a pacific movement.” Rather than rejecting the revolutionary path, the general strike was now presented as a new, decentralized form of “revolution,” which would be better

³²⁸ Pelloutier & Briand, “De la révolution”; 281-82.

³²⁹ Fernand Pelloutier, “Qu’est-ce que la grève générale?”; *FP*, 319.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 330.

³³¹ Jennings, *Syndicalism in France*, 18.

equipped against state-military forces than the classical mode of “insurrection ... concentrated in a restricted space,” and furthermore capable of disrupting the transport links and industrial resources upon which the military relied. However, the element of “legal subversion” was not discarded from Pelloutier’s argument, but merely shifted on to different ground: “The division of labour has been an excellent weapon – for the bourgeois class, but ... it is double-edged, and it would be nothing but just if, after having served for so long to squeeze the workers, it were to be used to eliminate the capitalists.” A general strike could paralyze the economy precisely due to the interdependence of its autonomous divisions; it was “capitalist political economy” rather than bourgeois law that would now be turned against itself. In relation to the *loi Waldeck-Rousseau*, this entailed that whilst the general strike could no longer claim to remain within its legally-sanctioned boundaries, Pelloutier was now effectively arguing that syndicalist illegality or even violence was necessary to achieve Waldeck-Rousseau’s own stated aims – in particular, his desire to ensure the “free exercise of industry and labour.” Thus, instead of a legal suspension of the workers’ own productive power, Pelloutier now defined the revolutionary general strike as the “taking into possession of the instruments of production” by the proletariat: “in a word, free production.”³³²

Pelloutier’s 1895 conception of the general strike thus linked an organic generalization of localized syndical activity to a political-economic subversion of the *loi Waldeck-Rousseau*. We may also note that whereas in 1892 the *Bourses du travail* had provided the essential framework for this tactic, they were not mentioned at all in the 1895 text – despite the fact that, during the intervening period, Pelloutier had become secretary of the FBT. This absence can clearly be attributed to the fact that the general strike was envisaged as an organic emanation of the workers’ everyday activity (and conversation); it would not be directly propagated through a particular organizational form. Pelloutier therefore had to conceive the role of the

³³² Pelloutier & Girard, “Qu’est-ce que la grève générale?”; 325-29.

Bourses on completely separate grounds. It will now be seen how the second key aspect of French revolutionary syndicalism performed this role in Pelloutier's discourse: namely, the *socialization of anarchist ideals*.

After moving to Paris in 1893, Pelloutier was introduced into an anarchistic intellectual milieu – in particular, a circle associated with the journal *L'Art social* – by his associate Augustin Hamon. Two facets of Pelloutier's "anarchism" during the subsequent period are worth highlighting. Firstly, he consistently regarded anarchism as a particular variety of socialism rather than a separate philosophy: more specifically, it was "libertarian" as opposed to "parliamentary" socialism, driven by a "communist" rather than "collectivist" vision of social production.³³³ Secondly, he primarily sought to apply anarchist ideas to what he called the "social question," whose root cause he identified in 1894 as the "accumulation of Fortune itself," which had submitted "labour" to the rule of "blind money," with the consequence that "it is not the worker who possesses the most today; it is, on the contrary, the parasite, the rentier, the man of finance."³³⁴ Pelloutier's main writings between 1894 and 1897 were an elaboration of this view of the "social question." On one hand, the parasitism of the capitalist class prompted Pelloutier's anarcho-communist critique of bourgeois moral decadence in his 1896 speech "Art and Revolt," which argued that the "perfecting of the present society" would require "the suppression of the means through which it authorizes the individual appropriation of common resources: that is, Money and Authority."³³⁵ On the other, Pelloutier examined the social victimization of the labouring class in a series of empirical studies (co-authored with his brother Marcel between 1894 and 1897), which were eventually collated as a monograph, *The Workers' Life in France* (1900). The conclusion of this study suggested that the solution to the

³³³ Hamon emphasized the status of anarchism as a variety of socialism, and elucidated the distinction between "communism" and "collectivism" (in short, they respectively envisaged the *abolition* and *redistribution* of private property) in a number of his writings (See: "De la définition du socialisme et de ses variétés [2/2]"; *L'Humanité nouvelle* 1.4 (novembre-décembre 1897), 719).

³³⁴ Fernand Pelloutier, "Qu'est-ce que la question sociale?"; *FP*, 381-85.

³³⁵ Fernand Pelloutier, "L'Art et la Révolte"; *ibid.*, 512.

workers' struggle for existence was "a state that does not seek to 'discipline' progress, and which leaves every arm, every brain, placed at the service of all other arms and all other brains" – in other words, an anarcho-communist society.³³⁶ In short, what Waldeck-Rousseau had called the "material, moral, and intellectual progress of society" was being held back by the bourgeois-capitalist order itself.

Pelloutier's aforementioned article "Anarchism and the labour *syndicats*" can be reinterpreted in this light. It can now be viewed as part of an attempt to restore Pelloutier's 1892 vision of the *Bourses du travail* as the future of socialism, which could no longer be posited in straightforward, tactical-organizational terms due to Guesde's rejection of the general strike. By elaborating the anti-authoritarian values of anarchism as a response to the "social question" – and, therefore, as an alternative variety of "socialism" – Pelloutier could conceive the syndical "turn" of the French anarchists as the *historical* realization of what Pelloutier had originally intended to achieve through political persuasion: that is, a socialist adoption of syndicalist tactics. (Of course, Pelloutier's "socialization" of anarchism was not purely his invention, but a specific expression of broader tendencies within anarchist thought.) This left Pelloutier with the task of representing the *Bourses* as a solution to the "social question," which he addressed in his 1896 report to the FBT Tours Congress, subsequently published in *L'Art social* as "Corporative organization and anarchy." This text identified the "creation of [commercial] signs of exchange" as the root of "violence, despotism, [and] fraud" within the "modern social system" (similar terminology to the "violence, assaults, threats, and fraudulent manoeuvres" proscribed by Waldeck-Rousseau's syndical law).³³⁷ The "objective" of the "social Revolution" was thus "to eradicate exchange-value," which entailed "liberating humanity, not only from all authority, but also from every institution that does not essentially

³³⁶ Fernand Pelloutier & Marcel Pelloutier, *La vie ouvrière en France* (Paris: Schleicher, 1900), 339-40.

³³⁷ Fernand Pelloutier, "L'organisation corporative et l'anarchie"; *FP*, 409.

have the development of production as its goal” – a clear statement of Pelloutier’s “socialization” of anarchist anti-authoritarianism. The *syndicats* would thus form the basis of a “future society” freed from commercial exchange – the “voluntary and free association of producers.”³³⁸

We can now turn to the final phase of Pelloutier’s writing, in which he focused on elucidating the role of the *Bourses du travail*, not merely as an element of the French syndical movement, but as a new and unique form of syndical organization. This argument was initially developed in his 1897 pamphlet on *The Syndicats in France*, and further elaborated in his *History of the Bourses du travail* (published posthumously in 1902). Here the specific nature of the *Bourses* must be noted. They were not trade unions in the traditional form, but grew out of labour exchanges whose primary function was to publicize employment opportunities; however, as these workers’ organizations took on a wider range of cultural and educational roles, they developed into a parallel mode of syndical association, organized along “interprofessional” and “geographical” lines rather than according to workplace or *métier*.³³⁹ In the *Syndicats* pamphlet, Pelloutier stressed that the *Bourses* were not a kind of administrative adjunct to the “professional” unions, but rather represented the latest stage in the “evolution of worker association”; whereas the “unions of *métier*” pursued the “immediate interests” of the workers and defended their means of “existence,” the *Bourses* had the task of representing the whole “proletariat” against forms of “exploitation” that were inscribed into the “social field” itself.³⁴⁰ Their role was one of “organization and education ... to make the workers into proud and free men”³⁴¹ – in other words, the specific type of preparatory “organization” permitted by his 1895 “General Strike” pamphlet, which would subsequently be placed under the rubric of

³³⁸ Ibid., 411.

³³⁹ See: David Rappe, “Les Bourses du travail, une expression de l’autonomie ouvrière”; *Cahiers d’histoire* 116-117 (2011), 43-55.

³⁴⁰ Fernand Pelloutier, *Les syndicats en France* (Paris: Librairie ouvrière, 1897), 1-3.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 15.

syndicalist “direct action.” In other words, the *Bourses* were the specific institutional form that corresponded to the generalization of localized syndical activity into a social class struggle.

Pelloutier’s *History* can then be viewed as the completion of his logic of syndicalist “direct action” *avant la lettre*. Firstly, its conclusion underlined how the *Bourses* were a social manifestation of anarchist ideals; as “sovereign and united” associations formed “by freely-established federative pacts,” the new *syndicats* had “realize[d] the federative principle [as] formulated by [Pierre-Joseph] Proudhon and [Mikhail] Bakunin.”³⁴² Secondly, it crystallized Pelloutier’s “political-economic” subversion of the *loi Waldeck-Rousseau* (whose statutes, along with the accompanying ministerial circular, were included in the appendix of the book). This subversion was represented most clearly in a chapter on “The work of the *Bourses du travail*” (first published as a separate article in 1899), which outlined their main duties as: “mutuality,” “education,” “propaganda,” and “resistance.”³⁴³ In other words, the *Bourses* were operating in line with the mission that Waldeck-Rousseau has assigned to the workers’ *syndicats*: “the study and defence of their economic ... interests.” We have already seen how the FBT’s “defence” of workers’ interests was shown by Pelloutier to necessitate breaking the law through a revolutionary general strike. In *History*, the FBT’s “study” of workers’ interests was similarly depicted as a way of turning bourgeois “political economy” against itself. On one hand, the ultimate horizon of syndicalist “mutuality” was the establishment of a “National Workers’ Office of Statistics,” whose data – Pelloutier claimed – would be superior to the “intermittent or periodic” information published by “governments” and “societies of political economy,” because it would emanate immediately from the federated workers themselves.³⁴⁴ On the other, the ultimate horizon of syndicalist “education” would be the *Musée du travail*, Pelloutier’s pet project of a museum that would “place before one’s eyes that very substance

³⁴² Pelloutier, *Histoire*, 262.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 141.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 174.

of social science: products and their history,” thus providing the workers with an organic entry point into political economy.³⁴⁵ These institutional ideals were the apotheosis of Pelloutier’s subversion of the *loi Waldeck-Rousseau*, as they extended the law’s specific provisions for syndical organization (employment “information offices”; “courses of professional instruction”) into means for the proletariat to take over the leadership of social production from the bourgeoisie.

I will conclude this account of Pelloutier’s role in the formation of French revolutionary syndicalism by examining his 1899 “Letter to Anarchists,” which is generally seen as his most emphatic call for anarchists to embrace the syndical movement. Whereas, in earlier texts, Pelloutier had suggested the *syndicats* as a fruitful avenue for anarchist activity, he now presented this argument in more imperative terms. He identified certain “new duties” for French anarchists with regard to their “practical propaganda”: “The majority amongst us have flitted from method to method ... haphazardly according to circumstances. One who yesterday treated art, lectures today on economic action, and the next day contemplates an antimilitarist campaign. Very few, having systematically traced out a rule of conduct, know how to stick with it and [thus] obtain the maximum results in a determined direction.” Consequently, Pelloutier called for a “firm choice by each of us, by the light of his own conscience, of a particular mode of propaganda.” This was not, he insisted, to impose a “unity of thought” upon anarchists, but rather to ensure that each individual anarchist would pursue their own propagandistic efforts with a “spirit of continuity” and “resolution” that would maximize its results. Pelloutier explicitly distinguished these “practical” concerns from the demands of “purely theoretical propaganda,” in which he felt the anarchists were positively excelling. He therefore wished to introduce greater resolve into the agitational element of anarchist

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 182.

propaganda, without in any way compromising the plasticity and individualistic vitality of anarchist thought – there was absolutely no question of establishing “continuity” at the level of opinions or principles.³⁴⁶

The concluding paragraphs of the “Letter” then asserted that syndical associations could provide a useful platform for “those [anarchists] who believe in the revolutionary mission of the enlightened proletariat to pursue more actively, more methodically, and more obstinately than ever the work of moral, administrative, and technical education necessary to render viable a society of free men.”³⁴⁷ This was a characteristic description of the revolutionary-pedagogical role that Pelloutier envisaged for the *Bourses du travail*: “to make [the] workers into proud and free men” by “reveal[ing] to the proletariat its proper value.”³⁴⁸ However, whether or not anarchists subscribed to this ideal of syndical education was a matter of individual conscience; the key point was that, for those who did hold this vision, the *syndicats* could provide the focal point for a distinct “mode of propaganda,” and thus strengthen anarchism in “practical” terms. Pelloutier accordingly requested that any anarchists opposed in principle to involvement with the *syndicats* should nonetheless remain neutral towards those who believed in the “utility of syndical organization” as a means to “realize our communist and anarchist conception.”³⁴⁹ The “Letter” asked anarchists to recognize the practical propaganda value of syndical organizations without necessarily believing that the *syndicats* were compatible with anarchism in principle. The fact that syndical activity would allow *some* anarchists to propagandize “more actively” and “more methodically” was the argument that Pelloutier addressed to *all* anarchists; the text did not attempt to persuade unconverted anarchists that the *syndicats* were indeed consonant with anarchist theory. In other words, propagandistic efficacy was posited as a value in itself.

³⁴⁶ Pelloutier, “Lettre aux anarchistes”; *FP*, 416.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 418.

³⁴⁸ Pelloutier, *Syndicats*, 15.

³⁴⁹ Pelloutier, “Lettre aux anarchistes”; 418-19.

Pelloutier's remarks on propaganda can be related to the trajectory of his own writing. In February 1897, Pelloutier had established *L'Ouvrier des deux mondes*, a monthly journal targeted at workers within the syndical movement, which subsequently became an official FBT organ. Much of its content covered the same themes as Pelloutier's earlier writings: on one hand, it reprinted his *Workers' Life* articles, previously published in various socialist and social-scientific journals, as a complete series; on the other, it carried cultural items under the rubric of *L'Art social* (sharing the name of the main anarchist journal to which Pelloutier had contributed), which were all authored by Pelloutier using his literary pseudonym of Jean Réflec. These elements appeared alongside reports on the institutional activities of the FBT. Thus, the themes of Pelloutier's writing on the "social question" were now condensed into the form of an institutionalized syndicalist journal. In other words, having previously "flitted from method to method," writing "haphazardly" on "art" one day, "economic action" the next, Pelloutier's syndicalist journalism had introduced a "spirit of continuity" to his propaganda.

A passage of Pelloutier's "Letter to Anarchists," in which he argued for the utility of the syndical movement, can be compared to a passage from his 1892 open letter to Jules Guesde, arguing against the exclusive use of universal suffrage. In the letter to Guesde, he wrote that:

... it does not suffice, to merit the honour of the people, to have written numerous and brilliant social theses, pronounced admirable discourse, and preached the socialist gospel to the four ends of the world. All those who, like us, armed for the social battle ... succumb nonetheless in a year, six months, perhaps tomorrow, under the combined efforts of the capitalist army; those who suffer ... from being unable to use the muscle or brains

that Nature has given them – these demand an accordingly more rapid transformation of the social order ...³⁵⁰

In the letter to anarchists, he wrote that:

... to hasten the “social revolution” and put the proletariat in a position to draw out all the desirable profit, we must, not merely *preach* the principle of self-government [*gouvernement de soi par soi-même*] to the four corners of the horizon, but also prove experimentally to the worker crowd [*foule ouvrière*], within their very own institutions, that such government is possible, and also to arm them, by instructing them in the necessity of the revolution, against the enervating suggestions of capitalism.³⁵¹

The common theme in both passages was the insufficiency of revolutionary “discourse,” whether socialist or anarchist, for achieving social transformation; some form of action had to accompany or precede this ideological “gospel.” This clearly connotes “direct action,” yet in neither case did Pelloutier dogmatically assume or rhetorically assert the revolutionary efficacy of unmediated worker activity. Both texts developed a more complex argumentation. In the letter to Guesde, the key factor was the natural productive capacity of the “people,” which would be wasted if socialist struggle restricted itself to its established methods and theories. Pelloutier thus proposed the revolutionary general strike, in opposition to universal suffrage, as the “apotheosis of productive force.” In the “Letter to Anarchists,” the fundamental co-

³⁵⁰ Pelloutier, “Lettre ouverte au citoyen Jules Guesde”; 312.

³⁵¹ Pelloutier, “Lettre aux anarchistes”; 418.

ordinates of the argument had altered. On one hand, instead of the “people,” anarchist discourse had to address the “proletariat.” The main problem was therefore no longer to liberate the unused productive force of the people – because the proletarian class was, by definition, already engaged in social production – but rather to redirect this social force in a revolutionary direction. On the other, whereas the letter to Guesde questioned the socialist tactic of “universal suffrage,” his letter to anarchists did not question the libertarian principle of “self-government”; the problem was rather to ensure its comprehension and adoption by the proletarian mass (“crowd”). Consequently, instead of proposing a wholly new form of action (as he had to the socialists), Pelloutier asked the anarchists to consider *synthesizing* their ideological values with the spontaneous institutional forms of the proletariat.

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Pelloutier’s writings established the key motifs of French revolutionary syndicalist discourse: the “general” extension of localized strike activity into a revolutionary class struggle, and the “social” realization of anarchist ideals through the *Bourses du travail*’s unique mode of workers’ association. Both of these elements contributed to Pelloutier’s political-economic subversion of the *loi Waldeck-Rousseau*, converting it into a blueprint for the workers’ seizure of social production. In 1886, Waldeck-Rousseau had identified the main goals of syndical association as the “study and defence” of the workers’ “economic interests”; Pelloutier accordingly proposed the revolutionary education of the workers through the *Bourses* and their economic self-defence through the general strike. Here it may be noted that the synthesis between anarchist ideology and the institutionality of the *Bourses* (linking both to the “social question”) constituted only one half of Pelloutier’s political vision – the element of “study.” The element of “defence” through the general strike was grounded in a separate logic, involving an organic

generalization of worker activity that was necessarily independent from ideological or institutional influences – beyond a certain degree of propagandistic encouragement. However, after Pelloutier's death in 1901, revolutionary syndicalist doctrine would strengthen the conceptual link between these elements, bringing both under the rubric of proletarian "direct action."

A major problem confronted by analyses of revolutionary syndicalist doctrine is the semantic plasticity of "direct action" – not only in terms of the wide range of syndical activities to which it was applied (including boycotts, sabotage, and strikes), but also with regard to its ideological significance. As a concept, "direct action" could denote action emanating instinctively from the workers themselves, action rooted in immediate economic interests rather than abstract political values, or action conducted without the mediation of the State or authoritarian, parliamentary socialist organizations. As a principle, it could imply that immediate, practical action was the best way of heightening the revolutionary knowledge and will of the workers, that it was the most effective means for combatting capitalist expropriation, or that it was the only way to avoid the diversion of workers' struggle into futile battles for "bourgeois" political rights. These different connotations of the term were broadly compatible, and can be said to have coalesced into a general ethos that underpinned revolutionary syndicalist writing. However, they still pose a problem for analysis, insofar as it is impossible to assign a "root" sense to the term; there are no objective grounds for deciding, for instance, whether the principle of worker autonomy either preceded or derived from the anarchistic opposition to State politics. "Direct action" did not place its various elements into a fixed structure of argument, but simply equated them all as aspects of a general syndicalist outlook.

In response to this perplexity, existing interpretations have emphasized the *rhetorical* properties of "direct action" – thereby rooting its significance in a practical propaganda-value, rather than in one of its various theoretical definitions. (Furthermore, it is often noted that the

concept could not form a coherent and codified doctrine without contradicting its own premises.) Thus, “direct action” is generally conceived as “the most popular of all syndicalist slogans” and an “artificial concept created by the [CGT’s] militant theorists,” whose propagandistic function underlay its distinctive melange of revolutionary ideas and ultimately determined its political-historical significance.³⁵² Two broad standpoints have accordingly developed within the historiography of revolutionary syndicalism. On one hand, its doctrine has been dismissed by some historians as “verbal insurrectionism” or a pure “rhetoric of protest” – an interpretation epitomized by Peter Stearns’ account of revolutionary syndicalism as essentially insignificant in French labour history, aside from having “produced distinctive and abundant rhetoric” in its “flaming speeches and congress resolutions.”³⁵³ On the other, more sympathetic studies have argued that revolutionary syndicalism prioritized practical considerations of how “to inspire and guide a movement” above the formulation of solid “theoretical premises”;³⁵⁴ for example, Barbara Mitchell argues that the plasticity of “direct action” was the mark of “an ideology designed to attract militants of every philosophical stripe ... a vehicle for welding together disparate groups of militants and workers.”³⁵⁵

Framing syndicalist “direct action” as an *extension* and *amalgamation* of the two key strands of Pelloutier’s revolutionary blueprint provides a new basis for interpreting this somewhat enigmatic concept. Firstly, it suggests a concrete political rationale for the term’s semantic plasticity, beyond the broad and abstract aim of achieving propagandistic appeal – namely, to bring together the aspects of syndicalist “study” and “defence” that Pelloutier had elaborated according to separate logics. Secondly, by pinpointing exactly how it extended upon and therefore differed from Pelloutier’s standpoint, it will be possible to identify the political-

³⁵² FF Ridley, *Revolutionary Syndicalism in France* (Cambridge University Press, 1970), 97.

³⁵³ Peter N Stearns, *Revolutionary Syndicalism and French Labor: A cause without rebels* (Rutgers University Press, 1971), 102-03.

³⁵⁴ Jennings, *Syndicalism in France*, 55.

³⁵⁵ Barbara Mitchell, *The Practical Revolutionaries* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1987), 34.

historical conditions that underlay the conceptual emergence of “direct action,” rather than simply viewing it more or less as an arbitrary rhetorical creation. This analysis will ultimately depict “direct action” as a point of textual synthesis between anarchist ideology and the institutionality of the CGT.

The main theoretical architect of syndicalist “direct action” was Émile Pouget, vice-secretary of the CGT and editor of its official newspaper *La Voix du Peuple* from 1901 to 1908. Like Pelloutier, Pouget is often characterized as an anarchist who viewed the rising syndical movement as a platform for the propagation and realization of libertarian ideals.³⁵⁶ This was clearly expressed in an 1894 article published in Pouget’s anarchist journal *Le Père peinard*: “I am anarchist, I want to spread my ideas, what is the terrain where they will germinate best? ... it’s the corporative group!”³⁵⁷ Again, however, it is necessary to complicate the nature of Pouget’s “anarchist” standpoint in order to fully understand his “syndicalist” position. Whereas Pelloutier’s anarchism must be placed in the context of a broader “socialist” outlook, Pouget’s anarchism cannot be separated from the literary strategy of the *Père peinard*, which was particularly notable for its use of “working-class vernacular” and colloquial argot, with a fictional shoemaker as its first-person narrator.³⁵⁸ Pouget’s initial involvement with the CGT was mediated through this vernacular strategy, as can be seen in an 1898 *Père peinard* article on “Sabotage.” The article began by relating the events of the recent CGT congress at Rennes, where the new tactic of “sabotage” had been loudly “acclaimed,” and delegates “from the four corners of France” had promised “as soon as they returned to their villages, to popularize [*vulgariser*] the thing, so that the workers get to practising it on a larger scale.”³⁵⁹ Crucially,

³⁵⁶ Maitron, *Mouvement anarchiste* [vol. 1], 273.

³⁵⁷ Émile Pouget, “Dans les syndicales”; *Almanach du Père peinard* (1896), 50.

³⁵⁸ HG Lay, “*Réflexes d’un gniaff*: On Émile Pouget and *Le Père Peinard*”; Dean de la Motte & Jeannene M Przyblyski (eds.), *Making the News* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 83. Because of its vernacular quality, Pouget’s anarchist journal has perhaps received closer attention from discourse analysts than political historians. See also: Marie-Hélène Larochelle, “Entre force et contrainte: L’*investif* chez Émile Pouget”; Larochelle (ed.), *Invectives et violences verbales dans le discours littéraire* (Presses de l’Université Laval, 2007), 49-60.

³⁵⁹ Émile Pouget, “Le sabotage”; *Almanach de Père Peinard* (1898), 28.

Pouget did not merely envisage the propagation of sabotage as a tactic of workplace revolt, but also the spreading of the word “sabotage” itself (which was a recently-coined colloquialism, based on the French *sabot*, a type of wooden clog). Sabotage operated as a kind of proletarian shibboleth: “Quietly, the proles of the factory slip the watchword [*mot d’ordre*] secretly into the ear And, without any hurry, production finds itself idling.”³⁶⁰ Thus, for Pouget, proletarian vernacular seemed to hold a certain revolutionary significance in itself, as a metaphorical and perhaps literal representation of the ideological dynamic required for an autonomous worker resistance to capitalism. He initially conceived CGT activity as a kind of co-ordinated extension of the project of revolutionary vernacularization that he was attempting through *Père peinard*.

Pouget’s involvement in the CGT organ *Voix du peuple* was a logical development from this starting point. In a lengthy report to the CGT’s 1902 Montpellier Congress, Pouget outlined his vision for the journal in surprisingly strong ideological terms:

In our epoch, a group of people – whoever they may be – will not be able to bring out and materialize their opinion except through the journal. The journal is the organ for popularization [*vulgarisation*] of the idea; without it, the idea cannot radiate. It is for this reason that, up to the creation of *la Voix du Peuple*, syndicalist doctrine remained imprecise, lacking the capacity to be concretized through the journal and purified by the fire of discussion.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 30.

Here it should be recalled that the notion of “syndicalist doctrine” *as such* was a relatively new one, tied to the development of the CGT; this is what allowed Pouget to make such a grand claim regarding the impact of his journal. He proceeded to quantify the journal’s achievements. Its discussions had “rendered the idea of general strike, which is gaining ground in all of the [CGT’s] milieux, more clear and well-defined.” Furthermore, Pouget noted that:

... this task of speculative elucidation in no way impedes labour organizations from conducting the quotidian battle, to resist day-to-day encroachments by employers Through the strike, boycott, sabotage, etc. – practices whose mechanism the *Voix du peuple* explains and comments upon – the workers endeavour to realize minor and successive partial expropriations, which form a route towards the general expropriation of capitalism.³⁶¹

This passage presaged the key argument of the “Amiens Charter”: namely, the syndicalist “double task” of ameliorative reform in the “present” leading to a revolutionary expropriation in the “future.” In 1902, it was the journalistic “elucidation” and “popularization” of the *Voix du Peuple* that formed an organic link between these two modes of syndical activity (“quotidian” and “speculative”). It should be emphasized that Pouget’s conception of syndicalism had not previously been outlined in any treatise or pamphlet; in other words, it was in this particular context – essentially, Pouget’s attempt to encourage subscriptions to his journal – that Amiens doctrine was initially formulated. It would therefore not be too outlandish to define the category

³⁶¹ Émile Pouget, “Rapport de *La Voix du peuple*”; [CGT,] *XIIIe Congrès national corporatif*, (Montpellier: Delord-Boehm et Martial, 1902), 86-87.

of “direct action” as grouping together *all the modes of action* “materialized” as ideas by “syndicalist” journalism.

The “popularization” of the *Voix du Peuple* was not based upon the vernacular strategy of *Père peinard*. The use of proletarian colloquialism was replaced by a kind of social empiricism. Pouget’s report expressed the hope that the journal would extend beyond its existing function as an “organ of education for militants,” and begin to focus more on “propaganda for the labouring mass.” For this, it would be necessary to shift away from “theoretical” articles based upon “sayings and ideas already in circulation,” towards an “exposé of facts, description of milieux, [and] exact documentation” that would “unveil the social monstrosities that stand before our eyes.” In short, the *Voix du Peuple* would increasingly base its “educational work” upon “social facts.”³⁶² This journalistic vision had clear affinities with Pelloutier’s conception of the educational work of the *Bourses du travail*. Two key points can be underlined in this regard: firstly, the notion that placing empirical content into a “popular” representational form (in Pelloutier’s case, the *Musée du travail*; in Pouget’s, the *Voix du peuple*) was the best way of arming workers against social exploitation; secondly, the notion that this empirical mode of social representation differed, in *form* as well as content, from established modes of social representation (for Pelloutier, the abstract formulations of “political economy”; for Pouget, the received ideas of “theory” *as such*). In short, both Pelloutier and Pouget conceived *popularized social empiricism* as the basis for an autonomous domain of “proletarian” social knowledge, formally distinct from existing modes of “bourgeois” social representation. The key point of difference, however, was that whereas Pelloutier’s *Musée* focused solely on elucidating the process of production, Pouget’s journal included the phenomenon of worker resistance (and, notably, the idea of “general strike”) within the range of “social facts” that it examined. In this light, “direct action” can perhaps be defined as

³⁶² Ibid., 87.

syndical activity viewed from the popular-empirical perspective of syndicalist pedagogy – in other words, “direct action” was the “social fact” of syndical activity.

I have suggested that Pouget’s long-standing commitment to journalistic “popularization” was a crucial factor in his initial conceptualization of syndicalist “direct action.” This hypothesis can now be applied to his treatment of the two aforementioned strands of Pelloutier’s political blueprint: the “generalization” of immediate syndical activity into a class struggle, and the “socialization” of anarchist ideals through syndical associations. As already suggested, Pouget’s development of these motifs led to their extension and amalgamation under the rubric of “direct action.” In this way, the journalistic mission statement of the *Voix du peuple* was translated into the programmatic standpoint of the CGT as a whole, ultimately expressed in the “Amiens Charter.”

Another of Pouget’s CGT duties was to lead its “Committee for Propaganda on the General Strike,” which in 1903 published the pamphlet *Reformist General Strike and Revolutionary General Strike*. The bulk of this text reproduced a 1901 *Voix du peuple* article by Pouget, in which he defended the general strike tactic against the criticisms of the moderate Socialist leader Jean Jaurès. Jaurès had argued that, whilst the general strike might be useful if limited to a large-scale “exercise of the legal right to strike,” it was both ineffective and illegitimate when conceived as “the precursor and preparation for an act of revolutionary violence.”³⁶³

On one hand, Jaurès asserted that any sudden, violent attempt to impose a new social order would engender an overwhelming reaction against the “militant fraction of the proletariat” by the “indifferent mass” of society, who were not yet conscious of the need for revolution.³⁶⁴ On the other, Jaurès argued that the general strike was “precisely the opposite of revolution,”

³⁶³ Jean Jaurès, “Grève générale et révolution”; *Études socialistes* (Paris: Cahiers de la Quinzaine, 1902), 102.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

insofar as “its object and effect” were “to decompose economic and social life,” halting the dynamic of production and communication on a national scale, and dispersing it into “innumerable local groups”; for Jaurès, a legitimate social revolution had rather to be based on the “consciousness of a vast unity.” For both of these reasons, it was “absolutely chimerical to hope that the revolutionary tactic of the general strike will permit a bold, conscious, militant proletarian minority to rush events”; any revolutionary transformation of society would first require “socialism to conquer the majority of the nation by propaganda and legality.”³⁶⁵

Pouget’s response to Jaurès firstly defended the idea of a revolution led by a conscious proletarian minority. In effect, he argued that the indifferent mass – which Jaurès expected to react against the general strike – was in fact so “sheeplike and unconscious” that it would accept revolutionary transformations as soon as they became “*faits accomplis*.” However, to mobilize such a passive majority *in advance* of a revolutionary action would only be possible through the “authoritarian” politics of “revolutionary dictatorship.” For this reason, social progress was dependent upon the “libertarian” revolutionary action of conscious minorities.³⁶⁶ Secondly, Pouget countered Jaurès’ claim that the general strike would entail a decomposition of social life into localized units. Here, of course, he emphasized that the revolutionary general strike would not halt social production, but would rather bring it into the control of the proletarian “corporative groupings”; the *syndicats* and *Bourses du travail* would thus provide the basis for a “new social organization.”³⁶⁷ To oppose Jaurès’ socialist critique of the general strike, Pouget emphasized the “libertarian” nature and “social” functionality of syndicalist federations – that is to say, the logic that Pelloutier had applied to all syndicalist activity *except* the general strike.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 117-19. We may note some similarities between Jaurès’ argument against the general strike and Bernstein’s “revisionist” standpoint (to be examined in the next chapter): for both, the economic capacity and political consciousness of the “mass” was inherently limited; therefore social transformation could only arise through a combination of legal trade union activity and parliamentary-socialist propaganda.

³⁶⁶ [Émile Pouget,] *Grève générale réformiste et grève générale révolutionnaire* (Paris: CGT, 1903), 4.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 11.

In short, the “revolutionary general strike” was now defined as the crowning moment of the synthesis between anarchist ideology and syndical institutionalality.

Pelloutier had tentatively suggested this view in his 1898 article “Popular Action,” which clearly influenced Pouget’s argument against Jaurès. Pelloutier had also addressed the question of revolutionary minorities, asserting that “revolutions are always the work of a minority; the more this minority is conscious of its role, the more it is victorious ... [and] the more it may be certain of public approbation.” (In other words, the key issue was not whether the majority could be brought to support revolutionary action *in advance*, but rather whether the effects of revolution would receive its *retrospective* approval.) For the revolutionary minority to be “conscious of its role” essentially meant, for Pelloutier, that it recognized “individual Property” as the problem at the heart of the capitalist “social organism”; if it removed this objective economic root of social suffering, the public’s retrospective “approbation” of the revolution would be guaranteed. Hence Pelloutier proposed that the “next revolution” would ideally emerge from “the economic grouping and instruction of the workers” (referring, of course, to the pedagogical work of the *Bourses du travail*), and that its victory would “oblige worker groups to organize the economic functioning of society themselves.” He then suggested that the “general strike” could provide an appropriate basis for a revolution of this kind; however, whether the “coming revolution” would in fact take this form was purely a matter of “conjectures.” As we have seen, the outbreak of general strike rested upon an organic dissemination and generalization of the idea amongst the workers themselves; as “schools of revolution, production, and self-government,” the *syndicats* could encourage but not ultimately determine or force this process.³⁶⁸

Pouget’s argument against Jaurès was clearly indebted to Pelloutier’s “Popular Action,” but seemed to be much more convinced that syndicalist activity would ultimately engender the

³⁶⁸ Fernand Pelloutier, “L’action populaire: ses raisons, ses ressources”; *FP*, 339-41.

“revolutionary general strike.” In part, this may be attributed to Pouget’s confidence in the continued mass-organizational growth of the CGT. However, it can also be linked to the specific nature of Jaurès’ standpoint. Despite his criticisms, Jaurès felt that the “idea of general strike” still held a certain value for the “social movement” – as a “revolutionary symptom of the highest importance,” which could act as a warning to the “privileged classes.” The “violent general strike” represented the “spontaneous form of worker revolt, a kind of supreme and desperate resource,” whose prevalence was a symptom of the “organic disorder” of “capitalist society” and the dire situation of the workers. Although, for Jaurès, it would be disastrous to put the “revolutionary general strike” into practice – it was essentially a “ruse” for the workers – its presence as an “idea” could strike fear into the bourgeoisie and convince them of the need for democratic social transformation.³⁶⁹ In short, Jaurès argued that whilst the revolutionary general strike should be held up as a warning to the bourgeoisie, it should be kept within strict limits of legality when proposed to the proletariat. Pouget’s response was not simply a defence of the general strike as an effective revolutionary strategy, but also a justification for addressing the “idea” towards the workers at all.

The difference between Pelloutier and Pouget’s treatment of the general strike can thus be linked to their different socialist adversaries. In Pelloutier’s case, the main issue was simply that the Guesdists had rejected the tactic. He therefore sought to establish that the general strike could arise organically without the need for socialist guidance – aided but not dependent upon the syndical education of the workers. In Pouget’s case, Jaurès did not simply reject the strategy, but sought to exclude it entirely from socialist discourse, viewing it as an irresponsible and counterproductive “ruse.” Pouget therefore had to insist upon the propaganda value of the *idea* of general strike, particularly as a way of elevating the revolutionary consciousness of the workers (and consequently appeared to place greater faith in the tactic in itself). Furthermore,

³⁶⁹ Jaurès, “Grève générale”; 120-21.

Pouget began to develop the argument (elaborated further in his later writings) that it was parliamentary democracy rather than syndicalism that in fact “rused” with the proletariat, leading workers down a political dead end that would not alleviate their economic condition. Whereas for Pelloutier the revolutionary general strike was merely a potential, speculative outcome of syndicalist education, for Pouget it became a tenet of “Syndical theory” and a key weapon in the propaganda battle against “theorists of parliamentarism.”³⁷⁰

Pouget’s extension of Pelloutier’s argument can be seen most clearly in their conceptions of the “conscious minority” that would enact the future revolution. For Pelloutier, this notion simply referred to a minority that was aware of the economic grounds of the “social question,” and would therefore direct their revolutionary action against capitalist production. Syndicalist education was one way in which this awareness might be obtained by a proletarian minority, in which case the revolution might take the form of a general strike. For Pouget, the “conscious minority” had an additional significance – it was the “libertarian” antithesis to the *passive democratic majority*, which could only be mobilized through the “authoritarian” politics of parliamentary socialism. By contrast, revolutionary minorities were necessarily imbued with a certain active will or *élan*, “which, by their example, put into motion and carry along the masses.”³⁷¹ To cultivate the proletariat into a “conscious minority” of this kind, economic knowledge and awareness of the “social question” would not be sufficient; it would also require the influence of syndicalist ideas – including the vision of a revolutionary general strike – to ensure the workers’ commitment to revolutionary action rather than parliamentary-democratic passivity: “if the proletariat follows the path of Jaurès ... it [will be] wholly unprepared for action when the bourgeoisie rises against the new society, and ... lacking revolutionary training, it will be defeated once more.”³⁷²

³⁷⁰ [Pouget,] *Grève générale réformatrice*, 2.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 16.

However, this dependence upon revolutionary syndicalist doctrine would seem to depart from Pelloutier's conception of the general strike as an organic "generalization" of localized worker activity. It would seem that, for Pouget, the workers required a certain degree of ideological guidance in order to direct their activity towards a "revolutionary" end. Here the journalistic logic of "direct action" became crucial. We have seen how, in his 1902 *Voix du peuple* report, Pouget stated that his journal's "speculative elucidation" of the general strike was in no way incompatible with the workers' "quotidian" activity, which formed a "route" towards the ultimate moment of expropriation. Both modes of worker activity – "present" and "future" – could be treated as "social facts" within the popular-empirical framework of syndicalist doctrine. The syndicalist "idea" of general strike was not an abstract revolutionary conceit, but a journalistic clarification of an existing revolutionary tendency within the workers' everyday practical activity. In this sense, the organicism of the general strike was restored with the help of the *Voix du Peuple* – in effect, the "popularization" of the syndicalist journal replaced the word-of-mouth dynamic envisaged by Pelloutier.

This logic was made manifest in Pouget's 1903 pamphlet, through the additions it made to his original 1901 article. Alongside his defence of the "revolutionary general strike" against Jaurès, Pouget now added a short discussion of the "reformist general strike." By this, he referred to the use of the general strike for the purposes of "partial expropriation" rather than a total revolutionary transformation, and cited the example of a recent miners' strike in France. He emphasized how this strike had initially been instigated by the "impulsion of a minority" – namely, the "conscious" and "syndicalized" section of the miners – before it had spread across the profession as a whole.³⁷³ The "libertarian" idea of "revolutionary general strike" was thus a generalization of objective tendencies visible within the existing forms of worker activity: "there is no fundamental opposition between ... the *expropriative* general strike [and] the

³⁷³ Ibid., 17-20.

reformist general strike; both fall under a common principle: the *direct action* of the working class [original emphases].”³⁷⁴ Syndicalist doctrine was simply the elucidation of this “common principle” inherent to conscious worker activity.

In this context, we can see that “direct action” was not simply a generic slogan for revolutionary syndicalist activity, but performed a specific conceptual function. It translated the journalistic logic of Pouget’s *Voix du peuple* into a general property of “conscious” revolutionary activity. It thereby allowed Pouget to reconcile the *organicism* of the general strike (developing from everyday worker activity) with its *doctrinal significance* (as a revolutionary “idea” opposed to the passivity of parliamentary socialism). At this level, it was not an arbitrary rhetorical invention, but a conceptual resolution of the contradictions that arose when Pouget had to extend Pelloutier’s syndicalist logic in opposition to the arguments of Jaurès.

To complete this account of syndicalist “direct action,” attention must be given to the second aspect in which it “extended” Pelloutier’s conception of syndical activity. Amiens doctrine was not rooted in the *Bourses du travail*’s unique mode of syndical association, but rather in the institutionality of the CGT. Pelloutier had suggested that the interprofessional nature and special educational resources of the *Bourses* gave them a unique capacity to facilitate the struggle of the whole “proletariat” against the capitalist “social organism.” In Amiens doctrine, these claims were transferred to the institutional “autonomy” of the CGT. In other words, it was not a radically new form of syndical organization, but the growth of the old forms into a self-governing, national confederation that underpinned the doctrine of syndicalist “direct action.” Instead of creating a specialized mode of “proletarian” association, the hard-won autonomy of the CGT was conceived as having liberated the inherently “proletarian” nature of

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 20.

the existing *syndicats*, previously suppressed by their mutual isolation and consequent dependence upon socialist organization. Accordingly, the CGT militants emphasized the organicism of syndical associations, linking their formation to the natural class solidarity of the workers. In 1903, Pouget stated that: “for the syndicalist, the *syndicat* is not a circumstantial association,” but “the organic cell of all society ... the organism of struggle.”³⁷⁵ The logic of organic development that Pelloutier had applied specifically to the general strike was thus extended to the institutionality of the *syndicats* themselves.

The “Amiens Charter” has been described as the “crystallization” of aspirations for “syndical independence” and “labour autonomy” that were already implicit in the founding statutes of the CGT, ratified at the 1895 Limoges Congress; from the outset, the CGT sought to group the workers “outside any political school.”³⁷⁶ However, the architects of Amiens doctrine attached a particular “proletarian” significance to the CGT’s autonomy, which rested upon a specific ideological framing of the institution itself. A key factor in this regard was the growing gulf between syndicalism and socialism. In itself, the statutory autonomy of the CGT did not necessarily preclude co-operation with the French socialists; it could simply entail a degree of administrative independence. A number of developments ensured that the “Amiens Charter” would be committed to the CGT’s political “autonomy” in a stronger sense. Firstly, the exclusion of anarchists and trade-unionists from the 1896 London Congress hardened the view of the libertarian syndicalists towards the “authoritarianism” of “social democracy.”³⁷⁷ Secondly, the “Millerand Controversy” of 1899, when the socialist Alexandre Millerand accepted the post of Labour Minister in a republican coalition government led by Waldeck-Rousseau, prompted syndicalists to argue that the agenda of parliamentary socialism was to

³⁷⁵ Émile Pouget, “Les bases du syndicalisme”; *L’action directe*, 53-56.

³⁷⁶ Stéphane Sirot, *Le syndicalisme, la politique et la grève* (Nancy: Arbre bleu, 2011), 57-60.

³⁷⁷ Augustin Hamon, *Le socialisme et la Congrès de Londres* (Paris: Stock, 1897), 183-85.

“governmentalize the *syndicats*” and thereby neutralize their revolutionary effect.³⁷⁸ Socialist involvement in the syndical movement thus became synonymous with state control. In 1900, the FBT vice-secretary Paul Delesalle declared that: “we do not care to be governed by Jules Guesde ... any more than to be governed by Waldeck-Rousseau.”³⁷⁹

This ideological framing of syndicalist “autonomy” was further buttressed by the CGT’s absorption of the *Bourses du travail* as a subordinate sister organization in 1902, achieving the long-mooted “unity” of the French syndical movement. The main architect of syndicalist unity was Louis Niel. Niel is often viewed as more moderate than the “revolutionary” CGT leaders, but his argument in favour of unification – presented in a speech at the CGT’s 1901 Lyon Congress – was ideologically consonant with the standpoint of Pouget and Griffuelhes. For Niel, the professional *syndicats* and the *Bourses du travail* did not differ in their basic principles, goals, and methods. As such, the co-existence of national federations for both types of organization entailed that the French “syndical body” was endowed with “two brains,” resulting in “hesitation” and “confusion” in its action. On this basis, Niel proposed the absorption of the FBT into the CGT. Although Niel’s argument was rooted in practical considerations, it also had an ideological component. The project of syndical unification was represented through the slogan of “labour unity,” which Niel defined as “the grouping of all workers in a powerful organization, with social justice as its goal and struggle at all moments and in all forms as its method.” In short, Niel’s argument for unification framed the syndical movement as an essential “grouping” of the workers, encompassing *all* forms and aspects of proletarian struggle, rather than as a specific method of struggle. Furthermore, Niel counterposed syndicalist unity to “socialist unity,” arguing that “syndical terrain is much more propitious” for the grouping of workers than “political terrain.”³⁸⁰ The merger was ratified at

³⁷⁸ Pierre Monatte, “Discours au congrès anarchiste d’Amsterdam (1907)”; *La lutte syndicale*, ed. Colette Chambelland (Paris: Maspero, 1976), 57.

³⁷⁹ Delesalle, *L’action syndicale*, 9.

³⁸⁰ [CGT,] *XII^e Congrès national corporatif* (Lyon: Decléris, 1901), 82-89.

the CGT's 1902 Montpellier Congress. A circular issued just before the congress, co-signed by Niel and Griffuelhes, announced the prospective realization of "*labour unity* with its happy consequences," and viewed it as a sign of "the endlessly growing force of revolutionary syndicalism" and "the progress accomplished by the organized proletariat in its syndical evolution."³⁸¹

This was the context in which Pouget produced his fullest exposition of revolutionary syndicalist doctrine, across a series of three pamphlets: *The Bases of Syndicalism* (1903), *The Syndicat* (1904), and *The Party of Labour* (1905). These texts formed a sequential argument: *Bases* outlined the "guiding notions of syndicalism" as a social theory;³⁸² *Syndicat* represented the trade union as a self-sufficient instrument of "social revolution";³⁸³ and *Party* provided a justification of the CGT's mode of "confederal organization."³⁸⁴ A key component of their argumentation was the *proletarian organicism* of the syndical movement. The *syndicat* was defined as an "initial and essential grouping" that arose "spontaneously" and "independently from all preconceived theories" – for "what could be more normal [than] for the the exploited of the same profession ... to unite for the defence of common and immediately tangible interests?"³⁸⁵ This principle extended to the "party of Labour" – that is, the confederal structure of worker organization exemplified by the CGT. (For the revolutionary syndicalists, the "party of Labour" denoted the association of the workers on the same scale as traditional political parties, but based upon immediate economic interests rather than imposed political values.³⁸⁶) Pouget asserted that the "party of Labour is a direct emanation of capitalist society ... the mode of aggregation of proletarian forces, to which the working class logically turns once it becomes conscious of its interests"; thus, "it is the grouping appropriate to the form of [capitalist]

³⁸¹ [CGT,] *XIII^e Congrès national corporatif* (Montpellier: Delord-Boehm et Martial, 1902), 39-40.

³⁸² Pouget, "Bases"; 83.

³⁸³ Émile Pouget, "Le syndicat"; *L'action directe*, 109.

³⁸⁴ Émile Pouget, "Le parti du Travail"; *ibid.*, 148.

³⁸⁵ Pouget, "Bases"; 53-56.

³⁸⁶ Jennings Jennings, *Syndicalism in France*, 30.

exploitation, and this is why it emerges spontaneously and without any preconceived idea presiding over its coordination.”³⁸⁷

However, if the CGT was simply a spontaneous emanation from the workers’ defence of their economic interests, then the purpose of its propagandistic and educational work becomes unclear. In other words, if the syndical movement developed outside the influence of “any preconceived idea,” then what was the role of syndicalist doctrine? Here, again, the logic of “direct action” was crucial. For Pouget, “syndicalism” was itself an organic proletarian phenomenon: it marked a “« moment » of worker consciousness,” which resulted from the workers “casting off” all the received ideas of social transformation, having “acquired the conviction that ameliorations ... cannot be achieved except as the result of popular force.” Thus, “[u]pon the ruins of sheepish hopes and miraculous beliefs ... [the workers] have elaborated a sane doctrine ... that has its roots in a loyal ascertainment and interpretation of social phenomena.”³⁸⁸ This can be seen as an ideological restatement of what, in 1902, Pouget had envisaged as the future direction of the *Voix du peuple*: a turn away from “theory” towards “social facts.” In order to represent “syndicalism” as an organic phenomenon (a claim that Pelloutier had reserved for the “general strike” tactic), Pouget had to translate this change in journalistic policy into an objective moment in the development of proletarian consciousness.

Two elaborations upon this “moment of worker consciousness” defined Pouget’s theory of syndicalist “direct action.” Firstly, the various “preconceived ideas” of revolution that the syndicalized workers had “cast off” were not simply obsolete or disproven theories, but rather the result of a “Machiavellian” attempt by the “bourgeoisie” to divert the workers’ struggle away from its true economic interests towards the futile pursuit of abstract democratic rights.³⁸⁹ Secondly, the empirical “interpretation of social phenomena” upon which syndicalist doctrine

³⁸⁷ Pouget, “Parti”; 122.

³⁸⁸ Pouget, “Bases”; 53-54.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 74.

was based was not merely a matter of economic facts, but also included (as we have seen) an elucidation of the actions and methods of the syndical movement itself – which could raise popular consciousness in terms of its revolutionary *élan* as well as its social knowledge. Thus, syndicalist doctrine was above all a “negation” of the “democratic idea” and the passivity that it enforced upon the workers’ struggle. Rooted in the “neutral field” of “economic terrain,” syndicalism was “differentiate[d]” from the “various socialist schools” by its rejection of “philosophical” and “political” abstractions. Instead, it sought to propagate “methods of action” that were “so natural” to workers that it could penetrate “even those most saturated by democratism.” This action had to be exemplified by “conscious minorities who, through their example, through their *élan* (and not through authoritarian injunctions) ... attract ... and draw the masses into action.” This, Pouget concluded, was “direct action in action!,” and gave ideological meaning to the syndicalist “autonomy” affirmed at Amiens.³⁹⁰

As already stated, *Bases* sought to “define the guiding notions of syndicalism,” and placed particular emphasis upon their “superiority over democratic principles”; whereas the ideals of democracy were rooted in “bourgeois egoism,” syndicalist ideals were rooted in a “sentiment of broad fraternity.”³⁹¹ More specifically, the opposition between democracy and syndicalism was, for Pouget, an ideological expression of the fundamentally-conflicting “bourgeois” and “proletarian” attitudes towards *social liberty*. In bourgeois thought, “the liberty of each [individual] finds its limit in the liberty of the other” – an “axiom” crystallized in “bourgeois Darwinism,” for which “society is a perpetual field of battle where the *struggle for existence* is the sole regulator between humans.” Conversely, the proletarian standpoint proceeded from the view that “the liberty of each [individual] increases through contact with the liberty of the

³⁹⁰ Pouget, “Parti”; 148.

³⁹¹ Pouget, “Bases”; 82-83.

other” – entailing that “solidarity,” “association,” or “accord for the struggle” was the “motor principle” behind “the progressive development of human societies.”³⁹² In the context of class struggle, these fundamental attitudes towards “liberty” and “society” translated into the doctrines of bourgeois “democratism” and proletarian “syndicalism.”

For Pouget, bourgeois-democratic doctrine – crystallized in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s theory of the “social contract” – performed essentially the same function as social Darwinism, albeit in a more sophisticated or surreptitious manner: namely, “to facilitate and justify the exploitation and oppression of the popular masses” in the “interests of the bourgeoisie.” (Here “democratism” can be understood as a doctrine of *political equality* as the basis of social justice; the question of democracy as a particular form of *representation* were only introduced later in Pouget’s argument.) As with social Darwinism, Rousseau’s theory implied that the liberty of individuals was mutually-limiting; thus, when “the human being accepts to live in society, he [necessarily] *sacrifices* a portion of his natural rights,” moving from the “state of nature” to the “social contract.” For Pouget, bourgeois democratism could thus inculcate a “spirit of sacrifice” and consequent acceptance of the “principle of authority” amongst the masses, masking the fact that the structure of capitalist society was inherently repressive and tailored to the interests of a parasitical bourgeoisie. This dynamic found its ultimate expression in the institution of the “State,” which was represented by democratic theory as an “agent of progress,” a “moralizing and pacificatory” force mediating between the conflicting individual liberties within society; in fact, the legal power of the state worked for the “profit of a privileged minority” against the “great mass of people,” by sustaining the structural inequalities of the established social order. It was therefore necessary for syndicalism to oppose the “bourgeois definition of liberty” with the “social truth”: that human beings are essentially sociable, that they obtain rather than lose their individual liberty through society, and that the essential condition of social progress is

³⁹² Ibid., 66-69.

solidary association rather than individual competition.³⁹³ Accordingly, syndicalism would replace the “oppressive regime of the law” (rooted in the “social contract,” an originary acceptance of certain restrictions upon individual liberty) with a “regime of free contracts” that would be endlessly “perfectible or revocable” at will, based upon a system of “economic federalism.”³⁹⁴

The outlined argumentation was clearly shaped by anarchist theory, particularly in its federalist critique of “authority,” the “State,” and the “law.” As Miguel Chueca notes, the critique of Rousseau’s “social contract” could be found in the “classical” anarchist writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Mikhail Bakunin, whilst the critique of social Darwinism was a prominent feature of contemporary anarchist discourse, especially in the works of the influential Russian anarchist Pierre Kropotkin on “mutual aid.”³⁹⁵ And, above all, Pouget’s argumentation concerning the “egoistic” and “social” conceptions of individual liberty drew strongly upon the works of Jean Grave, the leading French anarchist theorist of the period.

For Grave, the main significance of these divergent conceptions of liberty was in distinguishing his own “anarchist-communist” standpoint – which tied anarchism to the working-class movement – from egoistic forms of anarchism that were essentially detached from social struggle: on one hand, artistic libertinism; on the other, conspiratorial insurrectionism. In *Moribund Society and Anarchism* (1893), he distanced himself from the “pure and simple egoism” and “culture of the Self [*Moi*]” that characterized some anarchists. For Grave, the egoistic view implied that “the future revolution must be made by and for the strongest” (in other words, by an insurrectionary cabal rather than a social movement), and that “the new society must be a perpetual conflict between individuals” – indeed, a “struggle for existence.” At the same time, he opposed the “dogma” of “the oppression of individuality for

³⁹³ Ibid., 65-69.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 82-83.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 65n1; 66n1; 67n1.

the profit of the collectivity,” which required a “spirit of sacrifice” from individuals that would be “prejudicial to humanity itself,” since it would give free rein for the “egoists” to dominate. The anarchist-communist solution to the “pernicious” extremes of “egoism” and “altruism” was the principle of “solidarity”: “We unite ... with a view to obtaining the satisfaction of one of our aspirations. This association is in no way forced or arbitrary, [but] motivated solely by a need of our being.”³⁹⁶ In *Anarchy* (1899), this argument was linked explicitly to the question of organization. Whilst some advocates of “pure individualism” were opposed to any form of anarchist organization, Grave insisted that it could take the form of a “free *entente*” that would in no way compromise “individual initiative,” and furthermore asserted that “association is one of the conditions of human development,” necessary for the “intellectual” advancement of society.³⁹⁷

Pouget’s argument thus adapted the terminology and structure of Grave’s “anarchist-communist” standpoint, in order to counterpose the solidarist principles of syndicalism to the Darwinist “egoism” and sham “altruism” of bourgeois democracy. This might lead us to characterize Pouget’s syndicalism as a simple extension of Grave’s anarchism, which merely placed greater emphasis upon the *syndicats* as the vehicle for anarchist principles. Whereas Grave saw syndicalist activity as one of the many possible forms that anarchist-communist organization might adopt, and argued that “it would be dangerous to view syndicalism as the sole revolutionary means,”³⁹⁸ Pouget – swept up in the enthusiasm of the nascent CGT – saw syndicalism as the exclusive path to anarchist revolution. By this reading, the essential significance of Pouget’s argument was to posit “syndicalism” as *the solution to an established problematic within anarchist theory*.

³⁹⁶ Jean Grave, *La société mourante et l’anarchie* (Paris: Stock, 1893), 18-21.

³⁹⁷ Jean Grave, *L’anarchie: Son but, ses moyens* (Paris: Stock, 1899), 218-20.

³⁹⁸ Jean Grave, *Le syndicalisme dans l’évolution sociale* (Paris: Temps nouveaux, 1908), 8.

However, I would argue that Pouget's reconstruction of Grave's anarchist standpoint was more radical in nature – in other words, it affected the doctrinal “problematic” as well as the proposed solution. Two points can be highlighted in this regard. Firstly, Pouget's text reversed the order of priority given to *individualism* and *organization* in Grave's argument. In both of the previously-cited texts, Grave's “anarchist-communist” argumentation *began* by affirming the anarchist precept of “individual initiative,” and *then* used the distinction between egoistic and solidaristic liberty to establish that certain forms of social engagement and organization were still viable within the individualist parameters of anarchist philosophy. Conversely, Pouget's argumentation in *Bases* began by representing the *syndicat* as a unique organizational form: “the *syndicat* is the grouping *par excellence*, responding to all requirements ... the grouping apt [for] the work of capitalist expropriation and social reorganization”;³⁹⁹ it then used the distinction between egoistic and solidaristic liberty to elaborate the political-historical significance of the syndicalist movement as an emancipatory project. Secondly, Pouget's text introduced the dimension of *bourgeois-proletarian class conflict* into Grave's argument. Whereas Grave's “anarchist-communist” principle of “solidarity” was presented as a synthetic mid-point between the diametrically-opposed extremes of anarchist “egoism” and collectivist “altruism,” Pouget identified both of these “doctrines” as theoretical expressions of bourgeois self-interest.

The concluding section of *Party of Labour* can be seen as a direct precursor to the “Amiens Charter.” It carried the subheading of “Economic rise,” which referred to the emergence of syndicalism as a doctrine rooted in “economic action” rather than “politico-parliamentary action.” Its essential argument was to frame the CGT itself as a “conscious minority” and an incarnation of “direct action” in the sense of a replicable exemplar. Pouget firstly outlined the

³⁹⁹ Pouget, “Bases”; 54-55.

institutional history of the CGT, from its formative congresses in the early 1890s up to the Bourges Congress of 1904. An 1894 syndical conference in Nantes – at which a majority declared themselves in favour of “economic” rather than “political” action, leading to the establishment of the CGT the following year in Limoges – was described as a “definitive rupture from the capitalist regime.” It entailed that the “working class would forge autonomous organisms that would be, in the present, organisms of struggle,” and would “in the future” gain “enough revolutionary force” to confront “the political and administrative institutions of the bourgeoisie and destroy or absorb them.” However, the “economic” principle was not immediately realized in 1895, due to residual “political” elements within the *syndicats*; “in practice ... the CGT remained in an embryonic state.” The “elimination of all political preoccupations” was dependent upon the “degree of consciousness of the workers”; it was thus “a matter of time and the initiative of militants.” Only at the 1900 Paris Congress, which created Pouget’s *Voix du peuple*, did “revolutionary elements” begin to “predominate,” leading to the “unity” of Montpellier. This finally “realized” the vision of syndical autonomy that had been established in principle during the 1890s, providing the CGT with its “organic structure” and making it “a force that bourgeois society must reckon with,” aimed at the “definitive ruin” of “capital” and the “State.”⁴⁰⁰

Pouget then summarized the “programme” of the CGT, which represented “the essence of syndicalist doctrine.”⁴⁰¹ Here he cited the same statute of the CGT’s constitution invoked by the “Amiens Charter”: “The CGT groups, outside any political school, all workers conscious of the struggle” The “statutes of the CGT” were not to be “consider[ed] as an unalterable framework” but rather as the “expression of [a] moment” in worker consciousness, which was “subject to modification like any living organism”; more specifically, they represented “the

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 143-46.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 146-47.

most appropriate form of cohesion amongst the labouring masses [*masses ouvrières*] for the necessities of the present struggle.” The “doctrinal sobriety” of syndicalism, its freedom from dogmatic “credo[s],” meant that it could extract the “quintessence” and “common principles” that underlay a variety of “social doctrines,” but which were usually obscured by “philosophical” and “political” complications – namely, the workers’ inherent “will for amelioration and integral emancipation.” The “tactic and methods of action” of the *parti du Travail* were thus “so natural that the workers, ... as soon as they have entered the corporative organizations, submit to the influence of the milieu and agitate like all of [their] comrades, as syndicalists.”⁴⁰²

Pouget’s argument entailed not only that “syndicalism” reflected the organic “will” of the workers at the level of its doctrinal content, but also that the doctrine itself *performatively enacted* this organicism through its philosophical neutrality and statutory plasticity. The key point was not simply that syndicalism expressed the “present” needs and “natural” aspirations of the workers, but that *it created a form of doctrinal expression that allowed these needs and aspirations to take effect within the sociopolitical domain*. The CGT statutes were not lawlike edicts but the living expression of a self-determining movement: “In the *syndicats*, we philosophize little. We do better: we act!”⁴⁰³ Syndicalist doctrine had to enter a field in which other doctrines already existed and had a *de-naturing effect* upon the workers’ struggle. It was therefore not sufficient for syndicalist doctrine to reflect the workers’ organic interests; it also had to somehow counteract the effect of existing doctrines and thus liberate the true “nature” of workers’ struggle. The epitome of this “de-naturing” force was bourgeois “democratism,” which had made the artificial “consent of majorities” rather than the voluntarist action of “conscious minorities” into the basis of working-class politics. In this light, the rooting of

⁴⁰² Ibid.; 147-48.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 147.

syndicalism in “economic terrain” was significant not just because the workers’ interests were primarily economic in nature, but also because the concrete immediacy of economic facts could circumvent or counteract the “democratic idea”: the *syndicats*’ economic “methods of action are so natural that the workers, even those most saturated by democratism, ... submit to the influence of the milieu.”⁴⁰⁴

In summary, Pouget’s treatment of “direct action” was not merely a rhetorical valorization of syndicalist activity. It performed a specific conceptual function, resolving the contradictions that arose when Pelloutier’s two key arguments – the organic dissemination of the general strike tactic, and the “social question” as a link between anarchist ideology and syndical institutionalism – were extended and amalgamated (primarily in response to the sharpening antagonism between socialism and syndicalism). In this regard, the significance of “direct action” was rooted in the journalistic mission statement of the *Voix du peuple* – in particular, the notion that syndicalist activity was *itself* one of the “social facts” to be popularized by syndicalist propaganda. This popular-empirical logic allowed the *proletarian organicism* of the syndical movement to be reconciled with its task of providing a *libertarian education* to the workers. To transpose this journalistic logic into a programmatic context, Pouget defined the contemporary field of revolutionary doctrine as a propaganda battle between the “libertarian” activity of syndicalism and the “authoritarian” passivity of parliamentary socialism. “Syndicalism” was an organic expression of the workers’ revolutionary consciousness, which the institutional autonomy of the CGT had liberated from the enervating, bourgeois conceptions of “democratism”; its representations of “direct action” would naturally draw an increasing mass of workers into the syndical milieu. Hence the “Amiens Charter” declared that the CGT’s statutory commitment to political neutrality was not just an administrative matter, but a

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 148.

“recognition of the class struggle.” Ideological autonomy from socialism was a necessary condition for the “quotidian” struggle of the *syndicats* to develop into an “integral emancipation” by means of the “general strike.”

IV

The decomposition of German orthodox Marxism

The *formation* of German orthodox Marxism – culminating in the “Erfurt Programme” and its associated texts – soon gave way to the *decomposition* of the doctrine during the period leading up to the First World War. This process has been described, in the main accounts of pre-war German Social Democracy, in terms of a tripartite factional schism that developed amongst the SPD Marxists, mainly precipitated by two major debates: firstly, the controversy over Eduard Bernstein’s “revisionist” standpoint, outlined in *The Prerequisites of Socialism and the Tasks of Social Democracy* (1899), which proposed that the SPD should abandon its revolutionary aims; secondly, the debate over “mass strike” tactics, which Luxemburg argued that the SPD should adopt in *Mass Strike, the Party, and the Trade Unions* (1906). Thus, a reformist Right (represented by Bernstein) and a radical Left (represented by Luxemburg) splintered from Erfurt orthodoxy, leaving Kautsky in the Centre. For Carl Schorske, the Erfurt compromise between practical moderation and theoretical radicalism broke down due to new historical developments: on one hand, the electoral success and increased bureaucratization of the SPD bolstered the reformist Right; on the other, the dramatic outbreak of the 1905 Russian Revolution energized the revolutionary Left.⁴⁰⁵ For Dieter Groh, it was natural that “active” elements within the party would attempt to break from the tactical stagnation and passive “waiting upon the revolution” implied by the “Kautskyan” standpoint – on one hand, through reformist “*work in parliament*” (that is to say, legislative rather than purely agitational activity); on the other, through the “*discussion of extra-parliamentary means.*”⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁵ Schorske, *German Social Democracy*, passim.

⁴⁰⁶ Groh, *Negative Integration*, 62-63.

These accounts begin from the prevailing interpretation of Erfurt doctrine as a synthesis of radical theory with moderate practice based upon Marxist determinism – that is, the “scientific” inevitability of proletarian revolution. From this perspective, Bernstein and Luxemburg’s strategic departures from Kautsky’s orthodoxy would seem to be rooted in their theoretical rejection (for different reasons) of this deterministic principle, which resulted in them each rejecting one side of the orthodox “synthesis.” On one hand, Bernstein questioned the scientific validity of the Marxist prediction of an inevitable revolutionary cataclysm, and offered evidence that the contradictions of capitalist society were being ameliorated rather than intensified; for Manfred Steger, Bernstein’s effort “to reconceptualize socialism along revisionist lines ... involved, first and foremost, the rejection of Kautsky’s determinism and the complete deletion of the Erfurt Programme’s theoretical claims.”⁴⁰⁷ On the other, whilst Luxemburg maintained a belief in the scientific validity of Marxist political economy, she insisted that the advent of revolution could not be passively awaited, but had to be actively instigated through proletarian mass action; for Schorske, Luxemburg’s belief in the mass strike was the “product of Luxemburg’s personal experience of the contrast between the unorganized energy of the Russian Revolution and the organized caution of the German party.”⁴⁰⁸

Again, a different picture emerges in light of my reframing of German orthodox Marxism, which has decentred the element of revolutionary determinism, and instead focused on the textual synthesis between Marxist theory *as a sociopolitical form of knowledge* and Social Democratic practice *as a project of social enlightenment*. My hypothesis is that Bernstein and Luxemburg’s departures from Erfurt were primarily rooted in their respective reconceptualizations of this synthesis between the ideology and institution of the SPD. In this light, their arguments opposing Kautskyan “determinism” can be viewed as polemical

⁴⁰⁷ Manfred B Steger, *The Quest for Evolutionary Socialism* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 91.

⁴⁰⁸ Schorske, *German Social Democracy*, 57-58.

strategies through which they articulated their new visions of German Social Democracy, rather than their fundamental grounds.

The parameters of this argument must be specified. Whereas the formative or canonical texts of “German orthodox Marxism” (as outlined above) were all closely tied to the general project of bringing Marxism and German Social Democracy into synchrony, Bernstein and Luxemburg’s works were the product of separate intellectual projects whose premises were quite idiosyncratic to each individual. Bernstein’s revisionist turn was linked to a neo-Kantian empiricist tendency emerging within the SPD, the influence of British trade-unionism, and an effort to reconcile socialist principles with democratic liberalism.⁴⁰⁹ Luxemburg’s distinctive standpoint can be simplistically linked to her Polish background, which was the common factor behind her attachment to Marxist economic theory – first developed in her 1898 doctoral thesis, *The Industrial Development of Poland* – and her personal experience of the Russian Revolution – during which she travelled to Warsaw, then part of the Russian Empire, to participate. (Of course, a comprehensive outline of these influences will not be possible here.) My argument does not question the fundamental significance of elements opposed to Marxist “determinism” – for example, Bernstein’s rejection of Marx’s Hegelianism, or Luxemburg’s radicalizing experience in 1905 – for each theorist’s *overall* intellectual stance and development. It is purely concerned with their textual relationship to the canon of “German orthodox Marxism” as a result of these broader standpoints – in other words, how they inserted their intellectual projects into the literary-political context of Erfurt doctrine. It is strictly in this regard that interpretive priority must be given to the new syntheses that they each formed between socialist doctrine and Social Democratic institutionality. In both cases, their contentious contributions to SPD discourse began by attempting to address a problem *within* the framework of orthodox “scientific socialism,” and only subsequently developed into a critique of Kautsky’s centrism.

⁴⁰⁹ Steger, *Quest for Evolutionary Socialism*, passim.

In this light, the pre-war “decomposition” of German orthodox Marxism can be chiefly linked not to the ideological rejection of revolutionary determinism, but rather to the emergence of *trade unionism* as a parallel force to Social Democracy, following the dramatic growth in membership levels of the *Freie Gewerkschaften* (unions tied to the SPD, led by the reformist Carl Legien) from around 1895 onwards.⁴¹⁰ The unions’ mode of mass-organizational economic co-operation presented a new set of problems and potentialities for the “orthodox” synthesis of ideology and institutionality. In abstract terms, the unions represented a purely economic form of socially-transformative action, as opposed to the Erfurt vision of economic struggle guided by “necessary” political struggle. If Bernstein’s treatment of this question ultimately entailed severing the revolutionary tie between Marxist doctrine and German Social Democracy, Luxemburg’s work can be seen as an effort to restore this link in a way that incorporated the economic action of the trade unions (thereby neutralizing the revisionist threat). However, preserving the “scientific socialist” synthesis of theory and practice ultimately compelled Luxemburg to introduce an element of proletarian “spontaneity” into her argumentation. This inadvertently brought her into conflict with her former ally Kautsky, whose centrist position simply entailed the continued subordination of economic co-operation to Social Democratic politics. In this sense, Luxemburg’s standpoint was simultaneously the highest expression and the radical negation of German orthodox Marxism.

Here it is necessary to consider the treatment of trade unionism and economic “co-operation” within Erfurt doctrine. In Kautsky’s *Erfurt* commentary, the significance of the trade union movement was clear: it was the highest stage of the workers’ economic struggle prior to their “necessary” elevation to the political domain. As such, the unions were fundamentally limited in their ultimate revolutionary effect, particularly due to the divisive effects of labour

⁴¹⁰ Schorske, *German Social Democracy*, 12-13.

“aristocracy” (distinctions between skilled and unskilled labour), but they would provide the “most important and fruitful recruiting ground for Social Democracy” as its membership became increasingly proletarianized.⁴¹¹ The principle that divisions within the workers’ movement would disappear through the homogenization of working conditions under capitalism was clearly rooted in the “classical” Marxist theory of proletarian development. However, the notion that this would necessitate a transition from the unions to the Social Democratic party – rather than, for example, an extension and generalization of union activity to represent the proletariat as a whole, as the CGT militants advocated – would seem to rest upon what is usually seen as Kautsky’s doctrinaire attachment to the SPD’s particular mode of political activity.

However, as we have seen, Kautsky’s logic merged the classical process of proletarian development with a narrative of cultural and intellectual development, equating proletarian “self-consciousness” with the programmatic content of Marxist “scientific socialism.” In this light, a more substantive reason for the necessary transition from economic union to political party can be found in Kautsky’s theoretical treatment of “co-operation” in *Marx’s Economic Teachings*. A separate chapter was dedicated to the topic, reflecting its significance in the conscious transformation from capitalist to socialist society. The “simultaneous employment of many workers” under capitalism had naturally led to their “co-operation,” which in turn created a “new social productive power,” intensifying the “productivity of labour” to an unprecedented degree – labour became a “mass power.”⁴¹² Capitalism thus encouraged co-operation in order to increase the “surplus value” it gained from labour, but thereby “without wishing to, prepared ... the grounds for a new, higher form of production”: namely, the organized production of socialist society.⁴¹³ Why, then, could the co-operative workers’

⁴¹¹ Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm*, 216.

⁴¹² Kautsky, *Lehren*, 136-37.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 141.

movement not provide a basis for the proletariat to comprehend and consciously seize control of social production – forming, as the revolutionary syndicalists envisaged, an intermediary organizational form between capitalist and socialist society?

The crucial factor was how the capitalist process of production was *immediately* perceived by the workers. The capitalist mode of co-operative production had elevated labour to a “mass power” for the first time in history, rendering it capable of productivity on a society-altering scale. Capitalism could thus be mistaken as the necessary condition of mass productivity: “the leadership of production and the despotic rule of capital appear as one to the workers.” Furthermore, the ideologues of “bourgeois economics” took advantage of this fact to misrepresent the “technical necessity” of capitalist leadership as an eternal fact of “social nature,” such that the “rule of capital” appeared as the “*nature-necessary* [my emphasis] pre-condition of civilization.” The principles of Marxist “science” were crucial to counteracting this illusion; by distinguishing between the “labour process” and the “appropriation process” within capitalist production, Marx separated the necessity of “leadership” over production (which could involve any form of conscious planning) from the necessity of “capitalist rule” (which was restricted to a particular stage of social development).⁴¹⁴ This was perhaps the main point at which the orthodox conception as Marxism as the interpretive key to modern social appearances corresponded with the requirements of classical “proletarian” development.

The workers therefore required Marxist “science” to see through the immediate appearance of capitalist production. (Notably, it was not the fact of capitalist exploitation itself that was hidden from the workers, but the fact that they had the capacity to take over social production on the same “mass” scale as the capitalist regime.) How would they receive this message? From 1891 onwards, the answer was clear. The “Erfurt Programme” would tell them that the “development of bourgeois society leads with natural necessity” not to its eternal

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 138-39.

preservation, but rather to its revolutionary dissolution. They would then perhaps proceed to Kautsky's *Erfurt* commentary, Bebel's *Woman*, Engels' *Evolution*, or even Marx's *Economic Teachings*, in order to discover the underlying principles of this programmatic claim – and then on to *Capital* and the *Communist Manifesto*. (The preface of the *Erfurt* commentary explicitly presented itself as a Social Democratic “handbook” for the “masses,” which an “agitator” could use to “lead others into th[e] line of thought” represented by the canonical Marxist works.⁴¹⁵) For this reason, the Marxist programme of the SPD and its accompanying literary canon were a “necessary” political supplement to the workers' economic struggle once it had reached its highest point in the struggle against capitalism. This synthesis between Marxist theory and the SPD's party-programmatic form of popularization would be the springboard for the proletariat to a higher literary and cultural level.

We can now consider how Bernstein's “revisionism” was articulated within this doctrinal framework. A disciple of Engels who had, like Kautsky, worked with him in London during the 1880s, Bernstein's doubts over the Marxist vision of revolution first surfaced in a series of *Neue Zeit* articles entitled “Problems of Socialism” (1897). Although they were not written with any revisionist intent, several key elements of his later argument against Erfurt doctrine were present in these texts. In a discussion of English Fabianism, Bernstein noted how even “scientific theory can lead to utopianism when its results are regarded dogmatically,” and gave the example of the hypothesis in Marx's *Capital* that the removal of capitalist expropriation would occur through a transformative “social catastrophe.”⁴¹⁶ Another section on “industrial development in Germany” suggested that certain counter-tendencies were slowing the expected process of capitalist centralization and monopolization.⁴¹⁷ Finally, a section entitled “The

⁴¹⁵ Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm*, vi.

⁴¹⁶ Eduard Bernstein, “Probleme des Sozialismus [1/6]”; *NZ* 15.i (1896-97), 166.

⁴¹⁷ Bernstein, “Probleme [3/6]”; *ibid.*, 303-11.

Sociopolitical Significance of Space and Number” argued for the political importance of trade unions and co-operatives within the socialist movement, in order to foster the “economic self-responsibility” necessary for the administration of socialist society.⁴¹⁸ It was the last of these elements that effectively precipitated Bernstein’s break from Erfurt orthodoxy, as it conflicted not only with the classical logic of “necessary” proletarian development based on Marx’s canonical texts, but also with Kautsky’s party-political logic of proletarian acculturation based on the synthesis of Marxist science and Social Democratic literature.

Before elaborating this claim, I will summarize Bernstein’s argument in favour of trade-unionist organization in “Space and Number.” This segment of “Problems” was presented as an analysis of two key issues for “socialist discussions of the future”: “the problem of sociopolitical dimensions [*Gebietseinheiten*, “units of area”] and the ... closely linked problem of sociopolitical responsibility.”⁴¹⁹ Bernstein accordingly developed two intertwined arguments in favour of co-operative politics. Concerning the problem of “dimensions,” he asserted that the mass scale of modern social production placed certain absolute technical restrictions (relating to “space” and “number”) upon its total administration; for example, the “great numbers” necessarily confronted by an “individual” administrator would “have *no reality for him*, [and] would speak a language, whose full significance would increasingly recede from us.”⁴²⁰ (We may note how this differed from Kautsky’s treatment of “co-operation,” which argued that the organization of social production on a “mass” scale was beyond the *capitalist* individual, but not, as Bernstein suggested, individuals in general.) Nor would the “development of production” provide the solution automatically, as Bernstein had recently shown that the capitalist tendency towards “concentration and centralization” was not absolute, but somewhat mitigated by counter-tendencies.⁴²¹ For the future “socialist society” to realize a

⁴¹⁸ Bernstein, “Probleme [6/6]”; NZ 15.ii (1896-97), 141.

⁴¹⁹ Bernstein, “Probleme [5/6]”; *ibid.*, 100.

⁴²⁰ Bernstein, “Probleme [6/6]”; 142.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 139.

consciously-planned mode of social production, it would therefore require “intermediary organs [*Zwischenorganen*],” dealing with comprehensible segments of the overall process of production.⁴²² Concerning the second problem, it was also “utopian” of socialists to expect that upon the fall of the capitalist state, the masses would immediately be imbued with the “sentiment of social responsibility” required for socialist society to function productively.⁴²³ (This was especially true in a mass society, where communitarian sentiments would not come into play as it did in primitive communist societies of the past.⁴²⁴) Significantly, Bernstein specified that this problem would arise for a “socialist movement solely restricted to political agitation.” Purely political action could not instil a “social sentiment of duty” into the masses, because it was limited to the “raising of demands” and thus “bereft [of] a strong moral impulse,” especially once essential “political rights” had already been won (that is to say, from precisely the point at which Kautsky’s Erfurt politics notionally began to operate). It was therefore necessary to incorporate co-operative “organs of social self-help” into the socialist movement, which could foster the necessary sense of sociopolitical “self-responsibility” within the masses.⁴²⁵

Thus, in summary, trade unions or co-operatives represented the solution to both of the key problems raised by Bernstein with regard to the future socialist society: as “intermediary organs,” they would reduce the “sociopolitical dimensions” of production to a manageable scale; as “organs of self-help,” they would imbue the masses with a sense of “sociopolitical responsibility” that political action could not provide. I have suggested that this analysis effectively dismantled Kautsky’s Erfurt politics, a point that can now be elaborated. The conceptual pivot between Bernstein’s two arguments was an ambivalent conception of the modern “mass” as an *absolute limit to rational social administration*: for the argument of

⁴²² Ibid., 142.

⁴²³ Ibid., 141.

⁴²⁴ Bernstein, “Probleme [5/6]”; 105-06.

⁴²⁵ Bernstein, “Probleme [6/6]”; 141-42.

“dimensions,” the “mass” scale of the modern state signified a technical limit to human comprehension in absolute terms of “space and number”; for the argument of “responsibility,” the modern “masses” signified an absolute sociopolitical limit to communitarian sentiment and social duty.⁴²⁶ This can be contrasted with the treatment of “mass phenomena” at a related point in Kautsky’s *Erfurt* commentary. Kautsky stated that once the proletariat seized political power, it was inconceivable that it would not immediately institute a system of socialist production, for this would imply that “its consciousness and its knowledge [*Wissen*]” were significantly less advanced than their “economic, political, [and] moral” development. Aside from the formal incompatibility between low scientific consciousness and high cultural development within the proletariat, Kautsky noted a further guarantee:

At the same time, the economic development of contemporary society also goes so quickly and manifests itself in such conspicuous mass phenomena [*Massenerscheinung*], that it becomes visible even to the unlearned, as soon as it is indicated to them once. And this indication is not lacking, because insight into the economic course of development is at the same time ... becoming extraordinarily deep and wide-reaching, thanks to the continuation of the work begun in bourgeois classical economics, by *Karl Marx*.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁶ This conceptual slippage, which allowed a sociopolitical judgement on the “masses” to be conjoined with a self-evident or commonsensical description of the “mass” as extending beyond the individual, may be viewed as a symptom of the “crisis of modernity” to be characterized in the conclusion of this study. It can also be found, for example, in Robert Michels’ *Sociology of Political Parties in Modern Democracy* (1911), which conjoined the technical, spatio-temporal impossibility of mass democracy (in terms of literally assembling the people to form decisions) with the perceived intellectual inferiority of the masses.

⁴²⁷ Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm*, 230-31.

In other words, even if the objective development of proletarian consciousness somehow failed to deliver the “knowledge” required for socialist production, an ultimate guarantee was provided by the keystones of orthodox politics: the increasing perceptibility of social development to conscious understanding (here represented by the appearance of “mass phenomena”), and the party-programmatic popularization of Marxist theory (its dissemination to a “mass” readership). We may add that the emergence of the modern proletariat was itself described by Kautsky as a “mass phenomenon,” and was of course explained theoretically in the commentary; hence this sociopolitical guarantee could also cover proletarian “self-consciousness.” In short, *the comprehensibility of economic “mass phenomena” and the sociopolitical comprehension of the “masses” were necessary assumptions for the Erfurt vision of Marxist politics*. It was these assumptions, above all, that Bernstein refuted through his converse treatment of the “mass” in “Space and Number.” Thus, in place of the orthodox synthesis, he proposed a completely different system of mediation between German Social Democracy and the proletariat, involving the two-sided (economic and sociopolitical) functioning of co-operative associations.

It should be noted that Bernstein’s 1897 articles were not immediately perceived as contentious or damaging by Kautsky – perhaps in large part due to their theoretical isolation from party politics; his reaction to “revisionism” only came after criticism of Bernstein from the SPD’s radical Left instigated a public controversy, including a discussion at the party’s 1898 Stuttgart Congress, and Bernstein was thereafter emboldened to expand his critique of Marxism.⁴²⁸ In *Prerequisites*, the three aforementioned arguments broached in “Problems” were elaborated at length. The first two chapters gave a full account of the residual “utopianism” lodged within the “fundamental principles” of Marxist science, particularly its dogmas regarding the imminent collapse of capitalism and the proletarian seizure of power; Bernstein

⁴²⁸ JP Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg* (Oxford University Press, 1969), 95-98.

peremptorily blamed Marx's reliance on the "Hegelian dialectic" for the presence of these dogmas. The third chapter expanded on his view that empirical evidence showed counter-tendencies to the predicted course of modern industrial-capitalist development, including some "possibilities of adaptation" against crises and its ultimate collapse. Finally, a chapter on "The Tasks and Possibilities of Social Democracy" sought to reorient SPD politics around the "productive efficacy of economic associations [*Wirtschaftsgenossenschaften*]," a topic that had been treated with dogmatic "scepticism" in the "entire Marxist-socialist literature" ever since the co-operative system was dismissed out of hand by Marx's "Critique of the Gotha Programme."⁴²⁹

Again, it is my contention that the last of these elements was the key factor in Bernstein's rejection of Erfurt doctrine, and therefore stood at the root of the "revisionist" controversy *as a party-political event*. At this level, Bernstein's rejection of Marxist determinism is best understood as a polemical strategy, rather than the motive cause of his writing. This can now be substantiated, with reference to a text that he addressed to the Stuttgart Congress explaining his position (subsequently reproduced in the preface to *Prerequisites*). Bernstein's key statement was that: "I am opposed to the view that we are in a situation where a collapse of bourgeois society to be expected in the near future, and that Social Democracy *should determine its tactics or make them dependent upon the prospect of such an imminent, great social catastrophe* [original emphasis]."⁴³⁰ The first clause obviously summarized the two sides of his opposition to determinism: the residual utopianism or dogma within Marxist theory, and the empirical evidence of modern capitalist adaptation. The second clause regarding party "tactics" might seem to be a subordinate or corollary addition to Bernstein's debunking of the "great social catastrophe." However, as Kautsky would point out in his response to

⁴²⁹ Eduard Bernstein, *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie* (Stuttgart: Dietz, 1902), 94-95.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, v.

Bernstein, no suggestion of an “economic *collapse* and a *violent crash*” was to be found in the “Erfurt Programme” or its associated texts.⁴³¹ Here Bernstein was using the expectation of “catastrophe” as a rhetorical shorthand for general expectations regarding the transition from capitalist to socialist society – and we have already seen the main reasons for his opposition to Erfurt in this regard. Furthermore, as Luxemburg noted, Bernstein’s identification of empirical counter-tendencies to the development of capitalism might have, in principle, entailed a “postponement” of the proletarian seizure of power and a “slower tempo” of Social Democratic struggle – neither of which she felt to be controversial.⁴³² However, Bernstein’s Stuttgart address had also stated that if “economic development” was to be stretched over a “much greater span of time” than Marx had expected, it would also give rise to new “*forms*” which “were not foreseen in the *Communist Manifesto*.”⁴³³ Again, we know precisely what economic “forms” Bernstein had in mind. A final aspect of the Stuttgart address is worth noting: it showed how Bernstein was attempting to use the previously-examined writings of Engels, particularly the 1895 foreword, in order to justify his “revision” of Marx. Engels had, of course, suggested that the revolutionary assumptions of the *Manifesto* were obsolete; however, Bernstein completely dispensed with the framing argumentation, which restricted this obsolescence to the manifesto’s “contemporary” mode of address, and furthermore identified the Marxist party programme as its effective replacement. The problem was thus expanded to the content of the *Manifesto* as a whole – and the Erfurt synthesis fell down accordingly.

It now remains to examine Bernstein’s treatment of co-operatives in the final chapter of *Prerequisites*, showing how he elaborated the earlier arguments of “Space and Number,” in

⁴³¹ Kautsky, *Bernstein*, 154.

⁴³² Luxemburg, “Sozialreform”; 374.

⁴³³ Bernstein, *Voraussetzungen*, vi. The key co-ordinates of Bernstein’s “neo-Kantianism,” which was not as rigorous as many Social Democrats who identified with this tendency, can perhaps be seen in his use of “space” (in “Problems”) and “time” (in the Stuttgart address) as the rhetorical pivots between his argument against Marxism and his argument in favour of co-operative associations.

order to present the trade unionist movement as a *new sociopolitical synthesis* that could take the place of “Erfurt.” The chapter was split into four sections. The first concerned the “Political and Economic Preconditions of Socialism.” Both sides of this analysis began by opposing Marxist “catastrophe” theory, but ultimately slipped into his two arguments favouring co-operative association: the problem of “dimensions” and the problem of “responsibility.” On the “economic” preconditions of socialism, Bernstein began by reiterating that the development of modern capitalist production had proven to be less steady and uniform than Marx had expected. However, the statistics he cited to support this claim also allowed him to conclude with a separate observation, relating to the “dimensions” of the future socialist state:

An idea is given of the scale of the task ... that the state would confront ... when one considers that it would involve, in industry and commerce, about a hundred thousand businesses with five to six million employees What wealth of insight, expertise, [and] administrative talent must a regime ... have at its command to be equal to the oversight or economic control of such a colossal organism?

On the “political” preconditions of socialism, Bernstein began by criticizing the Marxist notion of “dictatorship of the proletariat.” The problem with the idea was that, against Marx’s expectations, the political movement of the “proletariat” was becoming *more* rather than less differentiated than the “people” who had participated in the classical bourgeois revolutions – although here Bernstein relied on a dubious definition of the “proletariat” as all those who were “dispossessed” in one sense or another. This provided the occasion for Bernstein to discuss the “trade unions,” whose variegated nature was the main sign of the fundamental “differentiation”

of the proletariat; furthermore, he insisted that the unions did not “create” this phenomenon (by holding back the political development of the workers), but simply reflected “factual differences.” Ultimately, the problem was the practical inability of political agitation to instil a sense of economic “responsibility” or “sentiment of solidarity”: very few workers had the “disposition and understanding” to look beyond the “bare amelioration of working conditions,” and for the “overwhelming mass [*Masse*] of them, the socialization of economic production can be not much more than an empty word.”⁴³⁴

Thus, under the rhetorical cover of his argument against the Marxist “catastrophe,” Bernstein smuggled in his arguments for the essential role of trade unionism in Social Democratic struggle – namely, the absolute limitation of rational social administration and communitarian social sentiment on a “mass” scale. The second part of his chapter accordingly focused on the “productive efficacy of economic co-operatives,” and began by arguing that Marx was dogmatically prejudiced against co-operatives due to their failures in the hands of “utopian” thinkers such as Robert Owen. Bernstein argued that the true reason for their failure was not their “bourgeois” mindset, but again a matter of scale; to operate efficiently above a certain size of undertaking, it was technically impossible to maintain “socialistic” equality within the collective. However, a solution to this problem had now emerged through successful co-operative endeavours in Britain: namely, a *differentiated* system of co-operative organizations that could form a total social organism – for example, “producer” and “consumer” associations or “urban” and “rural” co-operatives.⁴³⁵ We now see how Bernstein’s departure from Marxism can be linked to the *division of labour*, which Marx had believed would disappear in “communist society,” but which Bernstein saw as an unavoidable social fact that

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 86-91.

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 94-118.

could only be overcome through some form of organic intermediary between different sectors of production.

The last two sections of the chapter were concerned with the relationship between “Democracy and Socialism,” and how this related to the “Tasks of Social Democracy.” It was here that Bernstein’s new “synthesis” of ideology and institutionality was clearly articulated. This was summarized in his statement that “the trade unions or trade associations [are] the democratic element in industry.”⁴³⁶ The integral link between trade-unionism and democracy performed a similar function to the literary-political synthesis in Erfurt doctrine. On one hand, the unions were an institutional manifestation of “democracy” because their “tendency is to break the absolutism of capital and procure a direct influence upon the leadership of industry for the worker.”⁴³⁷ Co-operative associations thus performed an equivalent role to that of *popularized Marxist literature* in Erfurt doctrine – breaking the hold of “despotic capitalist rule” over the workers in an “immediate” fashion, but on a practical rather than theoretical level. On the other, Bernstein’s analysis of “democratic” ideals built upon his suggestion in “Space and Number” that political action was bereft of moral value (becoming a pure “raising of demands”) once essential rights had already been achieved. He now developed the positive side of this argument – that is, the moral value of agitation for essential democratic rights – and extended it to an ultimate horizon:

Within the concept of democracy, even in the contemporary outlook, [there] lies an incorporated notion of justice [*Rechtssvorstellung*] The more that it is vernacularized [*eingebürgert*] and rules over the general consciousness, the more

⁴³⁶ Ibid., 121.

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 121.

democracy becomes synonymous with the highest possible level
of freedom for all.⁴³⁸

The spread of democracy thus performed an equivalent role to *economic development* in Erfurt doctrine, in the particular aspect brought out most clearly in Bebel's *Woman* – that is, as an increasingly visible tendency within modern social life, which the “standpoint” of German Social Democracy was able to crystallize and clarify within party-political discourse and popular consciousness, ultimately leading the “people” to a higher stage of social development. Despite rejecting the notion of a cataclysmic transition to socialism, Bernstein gave the SPD an equivalent social mission:

The whole practical activity of Social Democracy goes towards creating circumstances and preconditions that will enable and ensure a transition, free of convulsive outbursts, from the modern social order into a higher one. From the consciousness of being the pioneers of a higher civilization [*Kultur*], its advocates create ever greater enthusiasm ... [and] the moral entitlement to their strived-for social expropriation.⁴³⁹

It is in this light that we must read Bernstein's categorical statement on the SPD's future path: “Its influence would be much greater than it is today, if Social Democracy found the courage to emancipate itself from a phraseology that is factually obsolete, and was willing to appear as what it is in reality today: a democratic-socialist reform-party.”⁴⁴⁰ Here Bernstein was not

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 123.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 127-28.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 165.

simply stating that the SPD should pursue the realistic path of reform rather than the dogmatic path of revolution, but also that only by *representing itself* as the vehicle of democratization rather than that of capitalist downfall could it perform the historic role that Erfurt doctrine had sought to assign to it – as the vanguard of social consciousness and civilizational advancement.

In conclusion, two formal comparisons can be made between Bernstein's synthesis of democratic ideals and trade-unionist activity and the orthodox synthesis of Marxist theory and party-political activity. Firstly, Bernstein's synthesis reversed the roles of the "political" and the "economic." On one hand, it was the political tendency of democratization rather than the economic tendency of capitalist development that German Social Democracy was tasked with bringing to social consciousness; on the other, co-operative association rather than party-programmatic literature was the popularizing mechanism through which this task would be made possible. As we have seen, this reversal was instigated by the amorphous sociopolitical problem of "mass" society. The limits it placed upon the "dimensions" of economic administration and the "responsibility" of political activity compelled Bernstein to make recourse to two phenomena that Marxism had explicitly sought to transcend – the division of labour and universal "bourgeois" rights – albeit in a new guise represented by the British co-operatives, whose organic solidarity and socialistic equality could perhaps mitigate these evils. Secondly, both syntheses can be linked to the gap in the political logic of the "Erfurt Programme." To reiterate, Kautsky's programme jumped directly from stating that *political rights were a necessary condition of the workers' struggle* to stating that *the SPD's political task was to guide and shape the workers' struggle*, without justifying that German Social Democracy was the appropriate *form* for workers' politics. Kautsky bridged this gap by showing how Marxist party-programmatic literature was required for the workers to initially recognize the possibility of overcoming capitalist rule; the necessity of the SPD's political action thus extended back to the moment at which the workers first confronted capitalism as

such. Bernstein's revisionism bridged the gap in the opposite direction, by expanding the pursuit of basic political rights into a continuous process of social democratization that encompassed the entirety of socialist struggle, up to and including the SPD's activity as the conscious vanguard of democratic culture and morality – the “democratic-socialist reform-party.” This comparison explains why Bernstein's proposed alterations to the “Erfurt Programme” were surprisingly modest and peripheral, yet he completely diverged from its official interpretation: the most important point of difference occurred between the lines of the programme.

The orthodox response to Bernstein initially brought Kautsky and Luxemburg into alliance. Kautsky's main riposte was the monograph *Bernstein and the Social Democratic Programme* (1899). The title of this work is indicative of his main concern; he presented Bernstein's standpoint as, first and foremost, an attack upon the party programme rather than upon Marxist science. However, at what I have identified as the decisive point of their conflict, Kautsky circumvented the fundamental problems raised by Bernstein's treatment of co-operatives, and simply reasserted the strict hierarchy of “economic” and “political” struggle. Kautsky stated that “the question of the productive efficacy of co-operatives” was closely tied to “the question of their relationship to state-politics,” but that Bernstein had not substantively addressed this issue; Kautsky therefore directed his criticism towards the statements of a “follower” of Bernstein – but this “Dr Woltmann” had merely argued that “economic organizations” were necessary for the pursuit of “political rights,” an argument with which Kautsky could easily dispense.⁴⁴¹ As such, Kautsky did not address the full implications of Bernstein's view of co-operatives as organisms of industrial democracy, the underlying problems of modern “mass” society to which they responded, or the consequent breakdown of the Erfurt synthesis.

⁴⁴¹ Kautsky, *Bernstein*, 161.

This task was instead taken up by Luxemburg, who responded to Bernstein in her article series *Social Reform or Revolution?* (1898-1899, also published as a monograph in 1899). Having arrived in Germany in May 1898, this work was explicitly viewed by Luxemburg as a way of establishing her status in SPD theoretical circles.⁴⁴² Unlike Kautsky, Luxemburg's analysis directly addressed Bernstein's view of "co-operatives and political democracy," and thus reaffirmed the orthodox synthesis between Marxist theory and SPD practice in a new form, specifically proofed against the "revisionist" vision. This can be characterized as a kind of *ultra-orthodoxy*, which was crystallized in Luxemburg's claim that:

... once the development of class struggle *itself* and its social conditions led to the sloughing-off of [Bernstein's] theories and the formulation of the principles of scientific socialism, there could – at least in Germany – be no socialism other than the Marxian [*Marxschen*], and no socialist class struggle outside of Social Democracy.⁴⁴³

In other words, the nature of the SPD's established political activity was itself conceived as a "historical necessity," guaranteed by the "development of the class struggle": "The proletarian movement ... becomes *Social Democratic* day by day."⁴⁴⁴ This might simply be viewed as an extreme form of Erfurt orthodoxy, with a particular "revolutionary" flavour. For Kołakowski, Luxemburg's outlook was defined by "an unshakeable, doctrinaire fidelity to the concept of iron historical laws" and an "unalterabl[e belief] that the working class was revolutionary in nature," to the extent that there was ultimately "no need of leaders to educate the masses or

⁴⁴² Nettl, *Luxemburg*, 89-90.

⁴⁴³ Luxemburg, "Sozialreform"; 442.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*; 444.

look after their consciousness for them”; the entirety of proletarian struggle was ordained by history.⁴⁴⁵ However, this description gives no real account or explanation of how her standpoint differed from Kautsky’s, other than perhaps to suggest that Luxemburg was more belligerent in temperament or rhetoric.

A better idea of the distinction between Erfurt orthodoxy and Luxemburg’s ultra-orthodoxy will be given by, again, decentring the element of revolutionary determinism and instead framing *Social Reform* as, first and foremost, a response to Bernstein’s conception of the trade unions. Its argumentation can then be compared to Kautsky’s original, orthodox subordination of the “economic” trade union struggle to “political” Social Democracy in his *Erfurt* commentary. Luxemburg developed several criticisms of unionism, summarized in the statement that “both Bernstein’s methods of socialist reform, the co-operatives and the trade unions, prove themselves ... wholly incapable of reshaping the capitalist mode of production.”⁴⁴⁶ All of Luxemburg’s arguments were economic rather than political in nature: unions were beholden to the capitalist “law of wages,” to the vagaries of the capitalist “world market,” and could only serve to oppose rather than promote the course of technological advancement – in short, they could not transcend capitalism as a *historical totality* or *world-system*. By contrast, Kautsky’s argument had emphasized a political factor: without the “proletarian” consciousness gained through political struggle, the trade unions could not overcome divisive factors such as “labour aristocracy.” However, Bernstein had asserted that the unions were not the cause, but rather the symptom and potential solution to this “differentiation.” By shifting the ground of attack against revisionist trade-unionism, Luxemburg could rescue orthodox logic from this vulnerability.

⁴⁴⁵ Kołakowski, *Main Currents* [vol. 2], 75; 82.

⁴⁴⁶ Luxemburg, “Sozialreform”; 420.

To be clear, this did not immediately constitute a difference of opinion between Kautsky and Luxemburg, but a difference in emphasis. In purely theoretical terms, their arguments were entirely compatible. However, this rhetorical difference had significant implications with regard to the synthesis of Marxist theory and party practice. We recall that a key aspect of Kautsky's argument was the workers' immediate experience of "despotic capitalist rule" as an apparent social "necessity," at which point Marxist party-programmatic literature – by exposing the true "nature-neccesity" of dialectical social development – became vital for the proletariat to recognize the possibility of controlling the productive process without the need for capitalist leadership. This was, notionally, the key moment of transition from trade-unionist to Social Democratic struggle, justifying the subordination of the former to the latter. In Luxemburg's analysis, the equivalent moment involved a different dynamic. Against Bernstein's wish "to introduce the socialist regime through pure trade-unionist and political [i.e., parliamentary] struggle," Luxemburg asserted that:

From the prevailing party viewpoint, [what] the proletariat attains through the trade-unionist and political struggle [is] conviction of the impossibility of radically reshaping their situation through these struggles, and of the unavoidability of an ultimate seizure of political means of power.⁴⁴⁷

Reformist struggle (both economic *and* political) was thus a "subjective" factor in socialist struggle, whose main function was to be an pedagogically-valuable failure that would increase the class consciousness of the proletariat. Again, this proposition was not theoretically incompatible with Kautsky's – they simply emphasized different moments in the development

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., 401.

of proletarian class struggle. However, the key point was that *they each linked the essential function and justification of the SPD's Marxist party-programmatic literature to these distinct moments* – for Kautsky, the transition from “economic” to “political” struggle; for Luxemburg, the transition from “reformist” to “revolutionary” struggle. Consequently, even though they were rooted in the same theoretical framework, the “orthodox” and “ultra-orthodox” syntheses between Marxism and Social Democracy were built on entirely different grounds.

For Kautsky, the decisive transition from trade unionism to Social Democracy occurred when, in the course of a struggle rooted in the *objective* response to capitalist exploitation, the workers recognized the political *possibility* of seizing control of social production, as opposed to the apparent “necessity” of eternal capitalist rule. The key role of the Social Democratic programme was to unmask the true “natural necessity” of capitalist development, which would lead to its ultimate collapse rather than its permanence. This would be the initial spur for the workers to study the party's popularized Marxist literature as a whole, gaining an understanding of “scientific socialism” as a theory of *dialectical social evolution*. For Luxemburg, the decisive transition from trade unionism to Social Democracy instead occurred when, in the course of a struggle rooted in the *subjective* will for social transformation, the workers recognized the political *necessity* of seizing control of social production, as opposed to the apparent “possibility” of gradual social reform. The key role of the Social Democratic programme was thus to present a vision of this ultimate socialist goal, to maintain the true course of proletarian struggle: “The union of the great popular mass [*Volksmasse*] with an aim transcending the whole established order, of the daily struggle with the great world-reform; that is the great problem of the Social Democratic movement.”⁴⁴⁸ This vision would be the initial spur for the workers' to study the party's Marxist literature, to gain an understanding of “scientific socialism.” However, the ultimate theoretical horizon of this induction into Marxism

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 443.

would no longer be the same. The futility of the “reformist” path was not explained through Marx’s general theory of dialectical social development, but rather through his analysis of *capitalism as a total world-historical system*. As already mentioned, it was the laws and tendencies of the capitalist “world market,” rather than the dialectical laws of society, which assured and explained the ultimate futility of trade unionism. (This was made clear in the strongest distinction that Luxemburg made between “social reform” and “revolution”:

Legal reform and revolution are not ... different methods of historical advancement ... but different moments in the development of class-society [The] legal constitution is purely a *product* of revolution. Whilst revolution is the political creation-act [*Schöpfungsakt*] of class history, lawgiving is the political maintenance [*Fortvegetieren*] of society.⁴⁴⁹

Hence, capitalism as a stage of revolutionary “class history” was a phenomenon above and beyond the constitutional forms that expressed it: a world-historical totality. Bernstein’s gradual democratization of the juridical forms of society could never constitute a “creation-act” capable of moving beyond the capitalist system.)

Luxemburg’s conception of the role of Marxist party-programmatic literature thus differed from that which underlay Kautsky’s orthodoxy. This had concomitant effects upon the other side of the “synthesis”: the increasing visibility of the social tendencies described by Marx, which made his theory indispensable for the public discourse (addressing the “people”) of the SPD. For the architects of Erfurt doctrine, the dialectical laws of social development were becoming ever more perceptible through the contradictory moods of “modern” social life,

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 428.

which is what gave Marxism its special persuasive power. What Luxemburg therefore had to establish, in order to reproduce the orthodox synthesis, was that the nature of “capitalism as a total world-historical system” was also becoming increasingly perceptible in modern society. This was what she effectively argued through her empirical criticisms of Bernstein. Firstly, in response to the means of capitalist “adaptation” (in particular, the credit system and capitalist cartels) that Bernstein had suggested could prevent a collapse, Luxemburg did not simply argue that these factors were insufficient to mitigate the overall tendencies towards crisis, but also claimed that they positively increased the antagonisms within capitalist society – for instance, between capital and labour. Marxist theory furnished the ultimate proof of this claim: capitalist adaptation ultimately required “either that the world market grows unrestrictedly and to infinity, or ... that the productive forces are fettered such that they cannot exceed the boundaries of the market”; the first was “a physical impossibility,” whilst the latter was ruled out by “technical revolutions.” As such, capitalist adaptations necessarily heightened the antagonism between the capitalist “productive” process (characterized by technical advancement) and “appropriative” process (characterized by the world market).⁴⁵⁰ Secondly, in response to Bernstein’s vision of gradual democratization of the state, Luxemburg not only emphasized the bourgeois nature of the contemporary state, but also noted two ways in which “capitalist development itself fundamentally transforms the nature of the state”: namely, “tariff policy” and “militarism.” Both of these aspects of modern European state-politics pointed towards the same ultimate guarantee of capitalist collapse as its aforementioned “adaptations”: the incompatibility of the growth of production and the physical limitation of the world market. It is worth noting that these arguments would later combine to form the main conclusions of her major work of Marxist economic theory, *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913).

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 386.

The nature of capitalism as an inherently antagonistic world-system was thus becoming increasingly visible in modern society and, in particular, modern state policy. Marxist theory thus obtained a special propagandistic or party-political value through its capacity to explain the seemingly-irrational trade conflicts and growing militarization of the major European states. Here a key differentiation from Erfurt orthodoxy emerged. In Bebel's *Woman*, Marxist dialectics was framed as the only basis for rational comprehension of the chaos of modern social life; bourgeois society was becoming unable to explain itself. German Social Democracy could thus represent itself as the eminent "scientific" standpoint within party politics, putting it in an ideal position to attract proletarianized intellectuals. The situation that Luxemburg depicted, however, was that of a *propaganda war*. There were now two ways of rationally comprehending the tendencies of modern society: the bourgeois-capitalist standpoint, epitomized by Bernstein's interpretation of capitalist "adaptation" and the propagandistic representation of state competition as the defence of "national interest"; and the proletarian-socialist standpoint, based on Marx's "historical" conception of capitalism as an antagonistic world-system. For this reason, the viewpoint of "scientific socialism" had to be *preceded* in Luxemburg's analysis by an element of proletarian class-consciousness, which grounded its fundamental differentiation from "bourgeois" sociopolitical rationality. This can be seen as the root cause of her "ultra-orthodoxy," and the aforementioned statement that "the development of class struggle *itself* ... led to the sloughing-off of [Bernstein's] theories and the formulation of the principles of scientific socialism." The key question, left largely unanswered in *Social Reform*, was of what this initial element comprised.

We are now in a better position to understand Luxemburg's transition from the "ultra-orthodoxy" of *Social Reform* to the infamous "spontaneity theory" of *Mass Strike*, which precipitated her break from Kautsky, and seemed to verge upon rejecting the revolutionary significance of SPD

organization altogether. Undoubtedly, *Mass Strike* was influenced by a recent upsurge of militant strike activity across Europe, including a 1905 miners' strike in the Ruhr, as well as the strike wave that powered the Russian Revolution of the same year – the main subject of Luxemburg's analysis. However, the text was not a general treatise on the mass strike tactic, nor even a contribution to the international socialist debate on the subject, but was explicitly addressed to the SPD (ahead of the party's 1906 Mannheim Congress), with the intention of showing "how far the lessons, that one can draw from the Russian mass strike, apply to Germany."⁴⁵¹ The political framework of these "lessons" was the specific conception of Social Democratic activity developed in *Social Reform*. Luxemburg's "revolutionary mass strike" was presented in explicit opposition to Bernstein's reformist vision of co-operative struggle, and the concluding chapter of the text was dedicated to the relationship between the SPD and the trade-unionist movement.

As previously stated, Luxemburg's "ultra-orthodox" reconstruction of Erfurt doctrine required the viewpoint of "scientific socialism" to be preceded by an element of proletarian consciousness – a particular viewpoint *vis-à-vis* capitalism, against its representation in bourgeois propaganda. The nature of this preliminary consciousness was unclear, although Luxemburg implied that it would arise through the learning process of active struggle. Furthermore, the crucial difference between the Marxist and bourgeois-rational views of capitalism was that the former recognized the *historical* rather than purely *juristic* nature of revolutionary history – i.e., the fact that the capitalist epoch was (and the socialist epoch would be) the product of a revolutionary "creation-act" rather than mere legal alterations to the precedent system. What Luxemburg saw in the "mass strike" (not merely the action itself, but the whole revolutionary process oriented around it) was a concretion of this argument. The manner in which *Mass Strike* concretized the conception of proletarian class-consciousness

⁴⁵¹ Luxemburg, "Massenstreik"; 134.

initially suggested in *Social Reform* will be examined in greater detail below, but its significance in relation to the orthodox synthesis of ideology and institutionality can be initially summarized.

The final chapter of *Mass Strike* argued that the revolutionary unity between German Social Democratic theory and the mass membership of the German trade unions was already effectively achieved thanks to the German proletariat's grasp of "scientific socialism." The only obstacle to this unity was the reformist, bureaucratic leadership of the unions – whose mindset was essentially akin to that of Bernstein:

In contradistinction to Social Democracy, which bases its influence on the *insight of the mass* into the contradictions of the established order and the whole complicated nature of its development, [and] on the *critical attitude of the mass* to all moments and stages of their own class struggle, the influence and the power of the trade unions are grounded in the inverse theory of the *incapacity of the mass* for criticism and decision [my emphases].⁴⁵²

These three invocations of the "mass" summarize the underlying ideological dynamic between Kautsky's orthodoxy, Bernstein's revisionism, and Luxemburg's ultra-orthodoxy. As we have seen, Erfurt politics was built around the "insight of the masses." This was not simply due to the necessary logic of capitalist maturation and proletarian development, but also due to the conjuncture between the increasingly-perceptible transformation of modern society and the popularizing mechanism of Marxist party-programmatic literature. We saw how this

⁴⁵² Ibid., 165-66.

supplementary logic was crystallized in the *comprehensibility of the “mass phenomenon”* (*Massenerscheinung*) posited by Kautsky’s *Erfurt* commentary. Bernstein’s revisionism challenged this presumption of automatic worker insight, implying a certain sociopolitical “incapacity of the mass” – not simply by challenging the Marxist dogmas of necessary capitalist development and the proletarian seizure of power, but also by positing the absolute limits of economic administration and political responsibility within a “mass” society. To ward off this revisionist threat (now identified with the trade union bureaucracy), Luxemburg had to incorporate an additional aspect into Erfurt logic: the “critical attitude of the mass” towards its own struggle, grounding its theoretical “insight” in an intrinsic element of historical class consciousness – one might say, an innate disposition towards revolutionary creation rather than legalistic reform. In *Social Reform*, this merely seemed to entail an extension of Erfurt determinism, suggesting that the “class struggle *itself*” was guaranteed by history. However, in *Mass Strike*, this extension was underlain by the *contagious transmission of “mass action”* (*Massenaktion*), whose revolutionizing effects had been shown by Russian events to be capable of extending across the national dimensions and political differentiations of the modern “mass.” The task of the SPD was thus to interpret and guide a revolutionary struggle instigated by proletarian mass action.

It was in this sense that Luxemburg’s standpoint represented both the highest expression and the decomposition of the Erfurt synthesis between Marxism and German Social Democracy. Luxemburg maintained the conception of Marxist theory as the “scientific” vanguard of rational social development and SPD literature as its ideal mode of popular dissemination, whose combination made German Social Democracy the leading light of the international proletarian movement. She furthermore proofed this revolutionary dynamic against Bernstein’s doubts over the capacity of the masses. However, to achieve this it was necessary for Luxemburg to ground the political mechanism of Erfurt in a precedent element

of proletarian class consciousness forged through active struggle, and crystallized in the “mass strike” tactic. This put paid to the confident hopes tied up with Erfurt doctrine for a peaceful, efficient, intellectual transition to socialism, in line with a general elevation of social consciousness and “insight”; Luxemburg herself spoke of a shift from the “parliamentary” to the “revolutionary” stage of proletarian class struggle. These differences between Kautsky and Luxemburg did not immediately emerge following the publication of *Mass Strike*, since the text had little initial impact upon the party. However, their split became clear in 1910 in response to mass protests in Berlin and across Prussia over blocked suffrage reform, which Luxemburg saw a clear sign of the workers’ revolutionary consciousness, and thus referred back to her analysis of the Russian precedent. A dispute over how the party should respond to these events developed in an exchange of *Neue Zeit* articles, including Kautsky’s “Between Baden and Luxemburg” and Luxemburg’s “Theory and Practice” (both 1910). A theoretical clarification of this dispute was subsequently provided by Anton Pannekoek, an ally of Luxemburg, in his “Marxist Theory and Revolutionary Tactics” (1913). Pannekoek emphasized that their dispute with Kautsky was not along the same lines of the earlier dispute between “revisionists” and “radicals,” but rather a new split within the radical camp:

Whereas, for revisionism, our activity is limited to parliamentary and trade-unionist struggle towards the achievement of reforms and ameliorations, ... radicalism emphasizes the inescapability of the revolutionary struggle ... for the seizure of power, and thus directs its tactics towards raising the class consciousness and force of the proletariat. Concerning this revolution, our views have now become opposed. For Kautsky, it will be based upon an act in the future, a political catastrophe, and all we have to do

until then is to prepare for this great, decisive battle For us, the revolution is a *process*, the first stages of which we are already experiencing, because the masses can only be ... formed into an organization capable of the seizure of power through the struggle for power itself.⁴⁵³

Luxemburg ultimately broke from the SPD as a result of the outbreak of the First World War. The parliamentary party's acquiescence in the *Reichstag* to the issuing of war credits was a confirmation of its failure to transition from the "parliamentary" to the "revolutionary" stage of class struggle. In an article on "The Reconstruction of the International" (1915), Luxemburg argued that after "Marxism ... had, for the first time in the history of the modern workers' movement, paired theoretical knowledge with the revolutionary dynamism of the proletariat," German Social Democracy had "in the course of half a century" exclusively developed the "theoretical" aspect; thus, in August 1914, it had failed its "greatest historical test," which had called for it to demonstrate "the second life-element of the workers' movement: the dynamic will, not only to *comprehend* history, but also to *make* it."⁴⁵⁴ During the war, Luxemburg established the *Spartakusbund*, grouping together the anti-war minority of the SPD Left. At the height of the 1919 German *Novemberrevolution*, the *Spartakusbund* formed the basis of a new revolutionary party, explicitly opposed to parliamentary Social Democracy – the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*. At this point, the decomposition of German orthodox Marxism was complete.

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⁴⁵³ Anton Pannekoek, "Marxistische Theorie und revolutionäre Taktik [1/2]"; *NZ* 31.i (1912-1913), 273-74.

⁴⁵⁴ Rosa Luxemburg, "Der Wiederaufbau der Internationalen"; *Die Internationale* 1 (April 1915), 9.

The anarchist theorist Daniel Guérin has asserted that “in spite of variants in presentation, there is no real difference between the anarcho-syndicalist general strike and what the prudent Rosa Luxemburg preferred to name the ‘mass strike’.”⁴⁵⁵ One point that might support this claim is the fact that, during the pre-war period – when ideas relating to mass strike or general strike were a prominent subject of socialist debate – both German revolutionary Marxists and French revolutionary syndicalists made use of the term “spontaneity” in their writings supporting or expounding the tactic. One might therefore posit that a certain logic of the “spontaneity of the masses” underlay both Marxist “mass strike” and syndicalist “general strike,” tying them to the same fundamental conception of revolutionary struggle. However, JP Nettl warns against taking Luxemburg’s statements on the “spontaneity” of revolutionary struggle too “literally.” For Nettl, Luxemburg initially adopted the term for a specific rhetorical purpose of persuading the leadership of the SPD of the merits of mass strike, without intending to propose anything through it. It was only due to her subsequent disillusionment with that leadership that she became “trapped ... in the terminological blind alley of spontaneity” in a more radical, anti-organizational sense; her purported “general doctrine of spontaneity” is therefore not to be “taken literally,” as it was essentially a matter of “words, not meanings.”⁴⁵⁶ In short, the two prevailing interpretations of Luxemburg’s “spontaneity” theory view it as either a conviction rooted outside Erfurt doctrine and Marxism, or a rhetorical flourish. In light of the preceding analysis, I will argue that Luxemburg’s “spontaneity” was a mark of her “decomposition” of Erfurt doctrine in response to the problem of the “mass” raised by Bernstein.

In this light, I will now examine the significance of “spontaneity” in the context of the “mass strike debate” that arose within the SPD between 1904 and 1906. In fact, discussions of

⁴⁵⁵ Daniel Guérin, “Marxism and Anarchism”; David Goodway (ed.) *For Anarchism: History, theory, and practice* (London: Routledge, 2013), 110.

⁴⁵⁶ Nettl, *Luxemburg*, 157.

this topic arose across the European workers' movement at this time, in response to a general upsurge in popular mass actions: the 1902 general strike in Belgium; a Dutch railway-workers' strike in 1903; the Italian general strike of 1904; a miners' strike in the Ruhr in 1905; and the mass strike movement that drove the 1905 Russian Revolution. Accordingly, resolutions on the mass strike were passed at the Amsterdam Congress of the Second International (August 1904), and subsequently at the Jena (September 1905) and Mannheim (September 1906) Congresses of the SPD. These statements of policy were accompanied by a proliferation of theoretical discourse on the subject, most notably in a succession of articles within *Neue Zeit*, as well as in two longer studies: *General Strike and Social Democracy* (1905), a work by the Dutch Social Democrat Henriette Roland-Holst that was championed by Kautsky as a key contribution to the topic; and Luxemburg's *Mass Strike* pamphlet, an attempt to influence opinion in support of the tactic at Mannheim.

“Spontaneity” can signify in two broad directions, both of which have clear pertinence to revolutionary discourse; these may be provisionally labelled as the explosive and organic senses of “spontaneity.” Explosive “spontaneity” denotes the impulsive, unforeseen, contingent quality of an event or action that arises for indeterminate or accidental reasons. This was the sense sometimes invoked when Marxists described “spontaneous uprisings [*spontanen Erhebungen*] ... in which the people of themselves [*das Volk von selbst*]” act “following a sudden inspiration.”⁴⁵⁷ Organic “spontaneity” denotes that which is immediate and inherent to a phenomenon or entity, in what is perceived as its natural or free state. This was the sense invoked when revolutionary syndicalists claimed that: “For syndicalism, everything lies ... in the spontaneous and ever new creations [*créations spontanées*] of life.”⁴⁵⁸ These significations of the term can be set in opposition, especially from an analytical perspective: when examining

⁴⁵⁷ Karl Kautsky, “Allerhand Revolutionäres,” [5/5]; *NZ* 22.1 (1903-1904), 734.

⁴⁵⁸ Hubert Lagardelle, “Le syndicalisme et le socialisme en France”; *Syndicalisme et socialisme*, 52.

a process with “spontaneous” elements, the former sense of “spontaneity” would suggest an *a priori* assumption or an immediate given, whereas the latter would function more like a *deus ex machina*. Equally, however, it is easy to merge or slip between these senses – for example, the “spontaneous uprising of the masses” can signify not only an explosive outburst of mass action, but also a mode of action that is organic to the “masses” as a determinate social or political entity. Thus, the moment of “sudden inspiration” that affects a given instance of “spontaneous” mass action (in the explosive sense) could slip into the notion of an inherent, creative energy that underlies all “spontaneous” mass action (in the organic sense). As will be seen, the radicalism of Luxemburg’s concept of “spontaneity” – which Nettl describes as an accidental, rhetorical inflation – might be comprehended in terms of a slippage from the explosive sense of the term, which had a certain presence in orthodox Marxist analyses of the mass strike, into the organic sense of the term, which exceeded the logic of orthodox Marxism.

The socialist policy resolutions on mass strike generally proposed the subordination of strike activity to the co-ordinated political struggle of Social Democracy. The Amsterdam resolution on the “general strike” (which, it should be noted, was treated as a side issue rather than a central topic of discussion) recognized “the strike with a political aim” as a “necessary and useful” instrument of revolutionary struggle, but dismissed the anarchistic ideal of “absolute [i.e. self-sufficient] general strike” as “impracticable.”⁴⁵⁹ At Jena, the SPD resolution elaborated this instrumental application of the tactic, identifying the mass strike as a defensive tool for the political rights of workers, and in particular for the suffrage rights upon which the parliamentary struggle of Social Democracy in turn depended. The mass strike was thus accepted as “one of the most effective forms of struggle” at the disposal of workers in “defence” of its rights to vote and associate, but the application of this method was strictly conditional

⁴⁵⁹ *Internationaler Sozialisten-Kongress zu Amsterdam: 14. bis 20. August 1904* (Berlin: Buchhandlung Vorwärts, 1904), 24-25.

upon the “political organization” and education provided by Social Democracy, the subordination of trade union activity to the party and even a “proliferation of the Social Democratic press.”⁴⁶⁰ Such was the comprehensive scope of these conditionalities, that it is perhaps best to read them as asserting the sovereignty of Social Democracy over workers' struggle, rather than a genuine effort to establish the required safeguards for successful use of the tactic.

Luxemburg's *Mass Strike* proposed a radicalization of this policy, questioning the theoretical underpinnings of the purely defensive “political mass strike” ratified at Jena; and it is usually suggested that she made this argument through the concept of “spontaneity.” By this reading, Luxemburg presented the 1905 Russian Revolution, in which “the element of spontaneity [*Element des Spontanen*] played a great role,” as a counter-example to the caution displayed at Jena, as well as to the views of “revisionists” (those in favour of the SPD pursuing democratic, legal reforms) within the party, and moderate trade-union leaders who wished even to ban discussion of the tactic.⁴⁶¹ As the “first historical experiment” that employed the mass strike “on a grand scale,” the Russian Revolution entailed a “profound revision” of traditional Marxist opposition to the tactic as an anarchist illusion;⁴⁶² for these events had demonstrated the revolutionary efficacy of the “spontaneous uprisings of the masses [*spontanen Erhebungen der Masse*]” occurring beyond any “predetermined plan” or “organized action” co-ordinated by the party.⁴⁶³ In short, “Luxemburg argued that not party directives, but the spontaneous actions of workers, culminating in the mass strike and revolution, would serve as the means of political transformation;”⁴⁶⁴ or, she posited that class struggle “grew spontaneously out of

⁴⁶⁰ Quoted in Karl Kautsky, *Der politische Massenstreik* (Berlin: Vorwärts Paul Singer, 1914), 125.

⁴⁶¹ Luxemburg, “Massenstreik”; 132.

⁴⁶² Ibid., 93-95.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 110-11.

⁴⁶⁴ Eric D Weitz, *Creating German Communism, 1890-1990* (Princeton University Press, 1997), 79.

heightened class tensions,” and that Social Democratic organization should therefore “prepare socialists to channel this spontaneous activity into productive directions.”⁴⁶⁵

Whilst these readings are adequate as broad characterizations of Luxemburg's standpoint, they do not give an full picture of her use of the term “spontaneity” in *Mass Strike* and other texts. In both sections of *Mass Strike* – Luxemburg's characterization of the Russian events, and her prognosis for the German situation – the significance of the term was much more ambiguous than a straightforward promotion of “spontaneous” mass action as a revolutionary lever would entail. The expectation of a “spontaneist” reading would be that Luxemburg identified “spontaneity” as an element of the Russian mass strikes, then proposed this element as one that should be fostered or protected through the SPD's mass strike policy. In fact, neither of these operations was performed in a straightforward manner, and the term was applied in a much more equivocal fashion. It will be argued that this equivocation in Luxemburg's text can be grasped in terms of the semantic ambivalence and reflexive anti-abstraction that I have already linked to the textual figure of “spontaneity.” This will suggest a reinterpretation of Luxemburg's “spontaneism” as a response to a problem of Marxist writing embedded within the discourse of German Social Democracy.

My analysis will be grounded in a fact that has rarely been interrogated in the existing scholarship: when Luxemburg wrote *Mass Strike*, the concept of “spontaneity” was already in use within German Marxist discourse on the mass strike, often in texts that supported the defensive, Social Democratic policy of “political mass strike” – and prior to the strikes in Russia and the Ruhr that, for many, inspired Luxemburg's “spontaneous” conception of the tactic.⁴⁶⁶ For example, in his 1904 article “Revolutionary Generalities,” Kautsky asserted that: “the political strike has the best prospect of success, when it rises up spontaneously [*spontan* ...

⁴⁶⁵ Gary P Steenson, *Not One Man! Not One Penny!* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1981), 219.

⁴⁶⁶ Schorske, *German Social Democracy*, 37.

herauswächst] from a given situation that has moved the whole popular mass into the deepest state of agitation [*Erregung*].”⁴⁶⁷ Despite lacking the explicit radicalism of Luxemburg's text (especially in relation to the Jena resolution), the seeds of her analysis can be found in the ambivalent way that “spontaneity” was applied across these texts. They also somewhat presaged the historical problem confronted by *Mass Strike*: when the key distinction between anarchist “general strike” and “political mass strike” was raised as an issue of Marxist theory, necessary attention to the historic conditions of strike action rendered the distinction more problematic than it was in direct Social Democratic statements of policy.

As previously stated, Luxemburg's pamphlet on *Mass Strike* was written in order to influence delegates at the SPD's Mannheim Conference (September 1906), with the hope of radicalizing the party's policy of defensive “political mass strike” as established the previous year at Jena. Its central argument was to cite the successes of the Russian Revolution, whose driving force had been a wave of mass strikes that broke out in January 1905; the Revolution had, by the time of Mannheim, apparently reached an initial stage of resolution with the establishment of the Duma parliament. In January 1906, Luxemburg had travelled illegally to Warsaw in order to participate actively in the struggle; however, this participation was not marked in any way within her text, and her analysis of the Revolution was largely directed towards earlier developments, which she had only “experienced” second-hand whilst still in Germany. Rather than Luxemburg's personal experiences, “spontaneity” marked the beginning of the event of Revolution in her analysis, as distinguished from earlier instances of industrial unrest that had sporadically occurred from around 1896 onwards. After a peaceful workers' protest in Saint Petersburg was violently suppressed by military forces on 22 January, strike actions quickly broke out in response across major Russian cities, in a series of “spontaneous uprisings of the masses.” Nowhere in the text did Luxemburg employ a discourse or rhetoric

⁴⁶⁷ Kautsky, “Allerhand Revolutionäres [5/5]”; 734.

of the eyewitness; the context for her use of “spontaneity” was a Marxist historical analysis rather than a descriptive recounting. When Luxemburg concluded her analysis of Russia, her statement that “the element of spontaneity, as we have seen [*wie wir gesehen*], played a great role” explicitly referred to the property of “spontaneity” that had been made “seen” or represented through her own preceding analysis, rather than a quality that was manifest in the events themselves.⁴⁶⁸

The divergence from a “spontaneist” line of argument in *Mass Strike* became apparent in the concluding three chapters of the pamphlet, which focused on the parameters and possibilities of mass strike in Germany in light of the Russian events. The concept of “spontaneity” was used only once throughout these chapters, and in a sense that by no means seemed to promote the phenomenon: “Social Democracy is the most enlightened, most class-conscious advance-guard of the proletariat. It cannot and must not wait ... fatalistically for the entry of the 'revolutionary situation' ... that falls from heaven in every spontaneous people's movement [*spontane Volksbewegung*].”⁴⁶⁹ Whilst this did not entail an absolute rejection of “spontaneity” under all circumstances, it certainly diverged from the advocacy of “spontaneous” mass action as a key plank of revolutionary struggle, or the idea that “spontaneity” as such had to be fostered in Germany by adopting the policy of mass strike. Furthermore, this statement cannot be read as implying that “spontaneity” was a special property of the “people's movement” (as might be suggested by the “spontaneous uprisings of the masses”); it simply represented an objective characteristic of the movement in certain aspects or situations, just as it might be great or small in number. For all that Luxemburg stressed the identity between revolutionary struggle in Russia and Germany, and even promoted the former as the model for a new series of proletarian revolutions to come, it does not appear that “spontaneity” represented either one

⁴⁶⁸ Luxemburg, “Massenstreik”; 132.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 146.

of the points of identity between the two national contexts or one of the model characteristics of the new revolutionary paradigm. Given that the term was used in an explicitly analytical rather than purely descriptive sense during the “Russian” section of Luxemburg's analysis, this fact renders the argumentative function of “spontaneity” in *Mass Strike* somewhat opaque.

In fact, even within Luxemburg's analysis of the Russian strike movement, the initial implications of “spontaneity” seemed to become moderated and reduced as the text developed. As mentioned, “spontaneity” was initially invoked in relation to the moment at which, in response to the violent repression of the Saint Petersburg protest, a wave of mass strikes swept across the major Russian cities. Luxemburg depicted this extension of the protest as driven by “spontaneous uprisings of the masses,” with the “onrushing proletarian crowd [*vorausstürmenden Proletariermenge*]” acting beyond any “predetermined plan” or Social Democratic instruction, instantiating an “endless series of local, partial, economic strikes” that extended across the whole “proletariat” (that is, not exclusively amongst its politically-conscious circles). She further suggested that the basis of this movement lay in how the initial “outwardly political act” of protest against the Petersburg repression “awoke class feeling and class-consciousness for the first time in millions upon millions as if by an electric shock,” and a “spontaneous [*spontanes*] ... shaking and tugging” at the “chains” of “social and economic existence” under capitalism, whose intolerability “suddenly ... came to consciousness” through this entry into an anti-Tsarist struggle. This “spontaneity,” explicitly identified with the “proletarian mass,” would indeed seem to capture an fertile element inherent to mass action that would be excluded by the defensive, Social Democratic “political mass strike,” which required the strike to be carefully instrumented by an already “conscious” proletariat. Luxemburg perhaps even gestured towards the special resource of this “spontaneity” when she

suggested that the “sufferings of the modern proletariat reminded them [i.e. the “proletarian mass”] of old, bloody wounds;” in short, the proletariat as avenging class.⁴⁷⁰

However, subsequent instances of the term throw doubt over whether Luxemburg's “spontaneity” identified an essential property of revolutionary mass action, an integral awakening of the proletariat – or merely marked an objective characteristic of certain events during the Russian Revolution, akin to, for example, the “local” nature of the mass strikes. Drawing some conclusions from her account of the Revolution, Luxemburg asserted that the “schema of mass strike as a purely political ... single act” (that is, in the Jena mould) could only befit one “subordinate variety” amongst the many types displayed throughout the complex Russian movement: namely, the “pure demonstration strike,” the strike as a display of sympathy or protest. In elaborating the “subordinate” nature of such strikes, Luxemburg again invoked “spontaneity” twice. Firstly, she stated that all of the major strikes that she had included in her Russian narrative “were not demonstrations but rather battle strikes [*Kampfstriks*], and as such mostly arose spontaneously [*entstanden ... spontan*], always from specific, local, accidental causes, without plan or design.”⁴⁷¹ Secondly, she argued that the demonstrative strike had performed, and could only perform, an initial or embryonic role in the Revolution, despite the fact that the Jena conception viewed it as a mature form the strike tactic. The aforementioned mass strikes of January 1905 involved a “demonstrative element, not indeed in an intentional [*absichtlicher*], but more in an instinctive, spontaneous [*instinktiver, spontaner*] form,” but later efforts by Social Democrats to organize demonstration strikes were unsuccessful (due, according to Luxemburg, to the proletariat viewing this as an insufficiently militant action once its consciousness was raised by the revolutionary situation).⁴⁷² In these statements, “spontaneity” no longer implied a special property or energetic resource of the

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 111-12.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 125.

⁴⁷² Ibid., 127.

stormy “proletarian crowd” in action, capable of positively resisting or exceeding any effort to organize it; it was here apparently reduced to a formal categorization of strike actions that happened to be unorganized, and which were indicative of a reversal of priority between political and economic struggle in the development of the Russian Revolution – an objective historical feature that Luxemburg wished to highlight.

It might thus appear that, following the initial suggestion of a certain inherent “spontaneity of the masses” at work within the Russian Revolution, it receded with the increasing formalization of Luxemburg's analysis into conclusions applicable to Germany. However, it may be noted that this apparent “reduction” also entailed a shift from the “explosive” to the “organic” sense of the term. This is evident in its first and last instances within the text: the “spontaneous uprisings” of January 1905 denoted actions that broke out explosively without prior co-ordination; the “spontaneous people's movement” denoted an immediate, organic expression of the “people” in political form. A further point can be made here: each sense of “spontaneity” was used to evaluate a revolutionary outbreak that could be characterized in the opposing, ambivalent sense of the term. In the first instance, the explosive “spontaneity” of the January mass uprisings was presented as a mark of the organicism of the revolutionary outbreak in Russia, as an immediate expression of proletarian class feeling; in the last instance, it was argued that to await the explosive “entry of the revolutionary situation” from the organic “spontaneity” of a people's movement was tactically incorrect. By bringing the ambivalence of the concept into consideration, a different light can be thrown upon its function within *Mass Strike*.

The “proletarian masses” and “people's movement,” to which the cited instances of explosive and organic spontaneity were attached, were the subject of distinct lines of argument. Summarizing her account of the Russian strike wave, Luxemburg stated that:

The mass strike, as the Russian Revolution has displayed to us, is not a crafty method, worked out for the purpose of the proletarian struggle to take more powerful effect, but rather the movement-principle [*Bewegungsweise*] of the proletarian mass, the phenomenal form [*Erscheinungsform*] of proletarian struggle in the revolution.⁴⁷³

Subsequently, commenting on the need to involve unorganized workers in any German mass strike policy, she asserted that:

The plan, to undertake mass strikes as a serious class action solely with the organized [workers], is ... an entirely hopeless one. If mass strike [and] if mass struggle is to achieve success, it must become a true people's movement, i.e. the broadest layers of the proletariat must be drawn into the struggle.⁴⁷⁴

In short, the “Russian” and “German” sections of Luxemburg's text were fundamentally separable, insofar as they formally maintained Luxemburg's opposition between the Russian events as a living event of “flesh and blood,” and the “rigid and hollow schema” of the political mass strike that existed in German debates.⁴⁷⁵ This opposition was crucial to Luxemburg's argument, as it combined her criticisms of the varying anarchist, “revisionist,” and moderate trade unionist views on the mass strike – in short, non-Marxist standpoints – through the general accusation that they held a “wholly abstract, unhistorical conception of mass strike”

⁴⁷³ Ibid., 125.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 143.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 124.

based upon “abstract speculations.”⁴⁷⁶ However, as a reflexive factor in her text, this opposition created a problem in terms of the transitional point in her own analysis – in short, the risk of her own historical account ossifying as an abstract schema. It was this factor which created the apparent interruption or argumentative lacuna between her treatment of the mass strike as “phenomenal form” and as a Social Democratic project. The gradual detachment of Luxemburg's use of “spontaneity” from its initial implications of proletarian instinct not only reflected this deeper, structural gap, but also – through the semantic slippage of the concept – formed a motif across the two sides of the analysis, a general treatment of the organic and explosive as ways of grasping and evaluating the outbreak of revolution both as a concrete historical event and as an abstract plan or project.

To gain a stronger grasp upon this aspect of Luxemburg's “spontaneity,” it will be necessary to turn to its precursors in the SPD “*Massenstreikdebatte*” at large. In relation to the mass strike, Marxist theorists used “spontaneity” in two broad senses, more clearly separated than in Luxemburg's text: on one hand, it denoted mass action that arose freely and organically from the unmediated struggle of the proletariat (“the idea of general strike, spontaneously arising [*spontan entstanden*] from the conditions of proletarian struggle”⁴⁷⁷); on the other, it denoted mass action that broke out in an unplanned, unforeseen, or uncontrolled manner (“its wholly spontaneous character [*spontanen Charakter*] ... it broke out totally unexpectedly”⁴⁷⁸). It can be shown that the argumentation and ultimate significance of several Marxist texts on mass strike rested upon a kind of slippage between these two metaphysical senses of “spontaneity,” that is to say, certain statements and arguments that were explicitly couched in one sense of the term could become implicitly grounded, restated, or extended in another sense.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 98.

⁴⁷⁷ Rudolf Hilferding, “Zur Frage des Generalstreiks”; NZ 22.1 (1903-1904).

⁴⁷⁸ Henriette Roland-Holst, *Generalstreik und Sozialdemokratie* (Dresden: Kaden, 1905), 64.

This “slippage” is often overlooked, because the organic and explosive senses of “spontaneity” are easily merged in the oppositional sense of the concept – that is to say, when the term is considered as a direct antonym to political “organization,” denoting “accidental, disorganized” mass action as opposed to “systematic work by parties and trade unions.”⁴⁷⁹ Such a definition would seem to hold for both senses of the term; however, a closer examination shows that each sense was opposed to Social Democratic “organization” in a distinct and specific fashion. When “spontaneity” designated the organic emanation of mass action from the immediate activity of workers, it was opposed to Social Democratic “organization” only in the sense that it arose autonomously and prior to the co-ordinated activity of the party. By this definition, “spontaneity” was not, in principle, resistant to subsequently becoming incorporated or subsumed within organized Social Democratic struggle. Conversely, when “spontaneity” designated the sudden, explosive outbreak of mass action, it was opposed to Social Democratic “organization” only in the sense that it could not be brought fully under its prescriptive control. There was no reason why “spontaneity” in this sense could not arise or take effect in the course of organized (in other ways) Social Democratic struggle, since it did not necessarily originate from an autonomous and extraneous revolutionary force.

Illustrative instances of each Marxist application of the term can be identified in two seminal articles from the *Neue Zeit* debate: firstly, the Austrian Marxist Rudolf Hilferding's article “On the Question of the General Strike” (1903), which arguably opened the “mass strike debate” in Germany, as it was the first of a sustained series of texts on this topic to appear in *Neue Zeit*; and, secondly, Kautsky's 1904 article “Revolutionary Generalities,” which he later characterized – in a 1914 monograph reflecting upon the development of the debate – as the text in which he had clarified his own standpoint amidst the “diverse conceptions of the

⁴⁷⁹ Kołakowski, *Main Currents* [vol. 2], 83.

conditions and effects of mass strikes” that had come to light in advance of the Amsterdam Congress.⁴⁸⁰

The concluding argument of Hilferding's article invoked the organic sense of “spontaneity,” to distinguish an aspect of the “general strike” that could be appropriated or adapted by Social Democracy as an weapon. Although the conception of the general strike as “a self-sufficient ... means of attack or defence” could be dismissed as a “pseudo-revolutionary, half-anarchist illusion,” the fundamental “idea of general strike” itself could not be “excluded from socialist tactics,” insofar as it arose “spontaneously ... from the conditions of proletarian struggle.”⁴⁸¹ Once the utility of the core “idea” was distinguished from its illusory, anarchistic articulation, it called for nothing more than an orthodox tactical adjustment within Social Democracy, in response to the political “conditions” or historic situation of the proletarian struggle, which disposed it towards the general strike tactic. In this sense, the “spontaneous” was, by definition, precedent to Social Democratic “organization,” but clearly not resistant – in fact, positively conducive – to becoming incorporated as, in Hilferding's phrase, a “regulative idea of the Social Democratic struggle.”⁴⁸²

In “Revolutionary Generalities,” Kautsky asserted that the political value of the strike lay in its “moral effect” (for instance, in undermining the confidence of propertied classes in the government); from this standpoint, he asserted that: “the more unexpected the strike, the more spontaneous [*spontaner*], the more it will produce this effect ... the best part of its effect is lost, when one announces it in advance for a definite point of time.”⁴⁸³ Achieving “spontaneity” in this sense only required that the execution of the mass strike was not to be planned out in every technical aspect; it did not further require its execution to be driven or determined by the integral nature of the proletariat – strictly speaking, this would have no direct

⁴⁸⁰ Kautsky, *Politische Massenstreik*, 67.

⁴⁸¹ Hilferding, “Zur Frage des Generalstreiks,” 141-42.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, 141.

⁴⁸³ Kautsky, “Allerhand Revolutionäres [5/5]”; 734.

bearing upon the disorienting “moral effect” of the strike. Moreover, Kautsky stated that the tactic of “political strike” was “too dangerous for one to venture to make direct experiments with it,” and required careful theoretical analysis with “definite results” before it could be practically applied.⁴⁸⁴ By implication, an “organized” Social Democratic framework was still to a certain extent necessary, in order to administer these theoretical conclusions on mass strike.

Taken in isolation, neither of these instances of “spontaneity” contradicted the principle that the revolutionary workers' struggle required political co-ordination through the Social Democratic party. Only in the event that the organic and explosive senses of “spontaneity” were fused together, such that it denoted an extraneous force that could not be brought under political control, did the concept truly constitute an antonym to Social Democratic “organization.” Such a slippage was clearly possible, as the oppositional merger of organic and explosive “spontaneity” could easily take place in a contemporary framework as well as in historiographical retrospect. However, to avoid misreading the revolutionary Marxist standpoint, it is necessary to attend to the complex textual-political dynamic that underlay the effects of this slippage, rather than simply assuming its operative presence. In particular, this will highlight how the radical significance of Marxist “spontaneity” was, to a large extent, a structural product of the mass strike debate as a political discourse, and was not necessarily conceived or grasped in a conscious or explicit manner by those who applied the term.

An illustrative example of such semantic slippage is found in Roland-Holst's *General Strike and Social Democracy*. On one hand, Roland-Holst asserted that the Italian general strike of 1904 was distinguished from the earlier strikes in Belgium and the Netherlands “through its wholly spontaneous character;” and this claim was glossed in the sense of an explosive, unplanned outbreak: “there could be no question of organization or planned unity, because it

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., [4/5]; NZ 22.1 (1903-1904), 690.

broke out absolutely unexpectedly.”⁴⁸⁵ This would seem to account for the fact that the strike had an “incomparably larger scale and more powerful effect” than those earlier events, precisely in line with Kautsky's aforementioned argument in “Allerhand.” Roland-Holst perhaps alluded directly to that article when she described the Italian uprising as “linked only by the moral bond of the same powerful agitation [*Erregung*].”⁴⁸⁶ On the other, she criticized the “parliamentary illusion-ism” of the French socialist Jean Jaurès, who had dismissed the general strike as “the spontaneous form of worker revolt,” in the sense of “a final and desperate means ... to disadvantage the enemy,” towards which workers would instinctively turn when deprived of the necessary means for parliamentary-democratic struggle.⁴⁸⁷ Here Roland-Holst's argument broadly aligned with that of Hilferding – the “illusion” of the general strike lay only in its anarchist application as the transformative lever of revolutionary struggle (Roland-Holst dedicated a chapter to dismissing this viewpoint), but to abandon this “spontaneous” proletarian tactic altogether conversely amounted to a naïve “optimism” in the “legal-parliamentary way” of achieving socialism, without an ultimate grounding in the integral proletarian struggle.⁴⁸⁸ A slippage occurred between these arguments when Roland-Holst presented the Italian general strike as an empirical counterpoint to Jaurès' argument: “The outbreak of the political mass strike as a spontaneous workers' revolt [*spontane Arbeiterrevolte*] ... has meanwhile [since Jaurès' text] occurred in Italy. But it does not appear that the Italian workers considered the strike as a 'tactic of desperation'.”⁴⁸⁹

This might be viewed as a rhetorical sleight of hand that served to buttress Roland-Holst's argument against Jaurès: having established the Italian strike as “spontaneous” in the explosive sense, it was now applied as an example to an argument concerning the political

⁴⁸⁵ Roland-Holst, *Generalstreik und Sozialdemokratie*, 64.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 125n.

value of “spontaneous” action in the organic sense. However, the semantic conjunction formed at this moment had crucial implications for Roland-Holst's text as a whole. This may be summarized very broadly in the fact that the anarchist “general strike” could not be cursorily dismissed in Marxist theory as it was in Social Democratic policy. When considering the historical conditions of the “political mass strike,” even in its limited defensive capacity, Marxist analysis could not wholly disregard the “general strike” as an immediate or instinctive form of workers' protest, and therefore as an expression of the situation of the proletariat. In Roland-Holst's text, whose explicit conclusions accorded with the stated line of Social Democratic policy, the anarchist general strike was presented as a misguided ideological extension of the same root phenomenon – “the strike ... from class feeling [*Klassengefühl*]” or “the generalized ... solidarity strike” – upon which the efficacy of the “political mass strike” was also ultimately predicated.⁴⁹⁰ This theoretical presence of the “general strike” in no way precluded the notion of subordinating mass action to Social Democratic coordination; indeed, it allowed for the principle to be reaffirmed and elaborated. However, it did entail that, where the Social Democratic resolutions could apply a straightforward categorical distinction, the revolutionary Marxist comprehension of mass strike had to introduce a problematic moment of transition – for the Marxists, German Social Democracy had to reappropriate the “mass strike” from its anarcho-syndicalist heritage, whilst retaining its inherent revolutionary force as a structure of “class feeling.”

The significance of “spontaneity” for the mass strike debate in Germany can thus be provisionally grasped as the specific aspect of the anarcho-syndicalist general strike that became translated into the framework of Social Democracy at this moment of theoretical reappropriation. In other words, it denoted the structure through which the “general strike” was determined by an innate or instinctive “class solidarity” – but only to the precise degree that

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 6.

this determination was also necessary for the Marxist “political mass strike,” and moreover could not be supplemented through the methods of Social Democratic struggle. Luxemburg's use of “spontaneity” in *Mass Strike* may be regarded as an explicit condensation of this underlying facet of Marxist writing on mass strike, articulated through the historical problem of the Russian Revolution. This can be sketched out with reference to two instances of “spontaneity” in Luxemburg's writing that preceded her analysis in *Mass Strike*.

Firstly, in her 1904 essay on “Organizational Questions of Russian Social Democracy” (1904), which criticized the “centralism” of the Leninist conception of Social Democratic organization, Luxemburg had argued that: “it is not the wording [*Wortlaut*] of statutes, but rather the sense and spirit [*Sinn und Geist*] invested into this wording by active militants [*tätigen Kämpfern*], that determines the value of an organization.”⁴⁹¹ A supporting argument, in the case of Russia, was her claim that the “most important and fruitful tactical turns of the last decade have not been those 'invented' by specific leaders of the movement, even less by its leading organizations, but have always been the spontaneous product of the unfettered movement itself [*das spontane Produkt der entfesselten Bewegung selbst*].”⁴⁹² (This was probably the first appearance of “spontaneity” in Luxemburg's published writings in German). Here Luxemburg referred to the strike actions of the late 1890s and early 1900s, which, in *Mass Strike*, were described as sporadic mass actions historically precedent to the outbreak of Revolution as such. If a broad continuity is posited between these texts, it may be argued that the explosive “spontaneity” of the 1905 strike movement already represented, in Luxemburg's overall corpus, a rearticulation in action of an organic “spontaneity” that she recognized as a key determinant of Russian Social Democracy.

⁴⁹¹ Luxemburg, “Organisationsfragen der russischen Sozialdemokratie”; *Gesammelte Werke* [Band 1.ii] (Berlin: Dietx, 1979), 434.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*; 431.

Secondly, in early 1905, Luxemburg presented her immediate response to the outbreak of the Russian Revolution in a number of articles, including “After the First Act” in February, which described the initial outbreak of the revolution in St. Petersburg: “the uprising [*Erhebung*] of the proletariat was spontaneous and the signal for it was given by an accidental [*zufälligen*] leader.” As such, even if “the aims, programme, and therefore the political character of the uprising ... was directly determined through the intervention of Social Democratic workers,” it was not performed “freely [*aus freien Stücken*], as [the Social Democrats] saw fit”:

It had to adapt itself to the pressure of the workforce [*Arbeiterschaft*], that had already become agitated [*in Erregung kam*] through the first news and rumours of the Petersburg events, and instinctively reached for solidarity-based action. Nonetheless it was Social Democracy that immediately gave necessary expression, the political rallying-cry [*Parole*], and clear direction to the storming [*Stürmen*] of the mass.⁴⁹³

It is clear that Luxemburg's standpoint had shifted by the time she wrote *Mass Strike*. However, the logic of this shift was highly specific, and must be grasped through the fact that it was effectively transposed from one part of Luxemburg's argument to another – whilst her initial response viewed the Petersburg uprising itself as “spontaneous,” *Mass Strike* attributed this quality to the “instinctive ... solidarity-based action” that ensued. This entailed a shift parallel to that between the Social Democratic resolutions on mass strike and the more problematic approach required by Marxist theory, which had to incorporate the element of mass “instinct” as a historic condition.

⁴⁹³ Rosa Luxemburg, “Nach dem ersten Akt (February 1905);” *Gesammelte Werke* [1.ii], 485.

Both of these existing passages on Russian “spontaneity,” reconstructed and condensed in *Mass Strike*, broached the problem of political expression or representation as such. This leads into a final point: attention must be drawn to a sociolinguistic element that implicitly attached to Luxemburg's use of “spontaneity,” which is easily overlooked as a rhetorical or circumstantial supplement. Firstly, Luxemburg's reference to “mass uprisings” was specifically characterized as “spontaneous” in opposition to the discourse of the party:

... here [during a strike wave in January 1905] there was no talk [keine Rede] of a predetermined plan or an organized action, as the appeals [Aufrufe] of the party could hardly keep step with the spontaneous uprisings of the masses; the leaders hardly had time, to formulate slogans for the onrushing proletarian crowd [die Losungen der vorausstürmenden Proletariermenge zu formulieren].⁴⁹⁴

Later, when discussing the applicability of the “lesson” from Russian events to the German situation, the significance of the term was opposed, in a sense, to legal writing. Some might argue that the “predominantly spontaneous [*spontaner*], elementary character” of the mass strike wave was indicative only of the “political backwardness” of Russia and its proletariat, and therefore inapplicable to Germany; but this view was dismissed by Luxemburg, as likely to emanate from those who would “read [*ablesen*] the maturity of social conditions in a country from the wording of its written laws [*Wortlaut seiner geschriebenen Gesetze*],” rather than from events including the mass strikes themselves.⁴⁹⁵ In this regard, the syndicalist to whom

⁴⁹⁴ Luxemburg, “Massenstreik”; 110-11.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 135.

Luxemburg's vision of mass strike bore the closest resemblance was Pelloutier – who had initially sought to introduce the general strike as a mass-organizational socialist tactic – rather than the later militants of “direct action.”

V

The decomposition of French revolutionary syndicalism

In this chapter, I will describe the doctrinal “decomposition” of French revolutionary syndicalism. This can initially be conceived as an inversion of the process of doctrinal “formation” described in Chapter 3. It was outlined how Pelloutier developed separate logics of syndicalist “defence” (the organic propagation of the general strike tactic) and syndicalist “study” (the syndical movement as a “practical school” of anarchist social theory). Pouget’s journalistic logic of “direct action” then amalgamated these elements; all forms of proletarian action, ranging from immediate acts of resistance to the revolutionary general strike, were couched as empirical “social facts” that would be popularized through syndicalist propaganda. For Pouget, the ideological and institutional aspects of French syndicalism were both rooted in this dynamic; the crux of Amiens doctrine was therefore an all-encompassing synthesis between the “organic” ideology of syndicalism and the “organic” institution of the CGT. However, the separate elements of Pelloutier’s syndicalism were never totally subsumed by the logic of “direct action.”

Unlike in the case of German orthodox Marxism, this process of decomposition did not cause factional divisions amongst the adherents of Amiens syndicalism. The schisms within SPD Marxism were engendered by the “revisionist” standpoint of Eduard Bernstein, whose root assumption was that modern social development had placed absolute, sociopolitical limits upon the revolutionary capacity of the “masses.” However, we saw in the previous chapter how French revolutionary syndicalism confronted this particular viewpoint during the formative stage of its development, particularly in the guise of Jean Jaurès’ democratic-socialist critique of the general strike. Syndicalist “direct action” was fundamentally antithetical to any notion that the masses lacked an inherent capacity for the revolutionary transformation of society;

indeed, its aim was precisely to create this capacity through an immediate emphasis on practice. The “Amiens Charter” was thus already a definitive statement against “reformism” within the syndical movement. In other words, a position equivalent to Bernstein’s (positing the revolutionary incapacity of the masses) could never be represented as a “revision” of Amiens doctrine – it would necessarily depart from “revolutionary syndicalism” entirely.

Instead, the decomposition of Amiens logic must be related to its anti-theoretical or even anti-intellectual standpoint – that is, its opposition to abstract “preconceived ideas.” The following analysis will highlight a tendency within revolutionary syndicalist writing that conflicted with this central aspect of “direct action,” yet nonetheless played a crucial (perhaps even necessary) role in the historical development and articulation of “revolutionary syndicalism” as a doctrine. In this light, I will firstly examine the theoretical output of the revolutionary CGT militants in the period following the Amiens Congress. During this time, ideological enthusiasm for “direct action” and the institutional momentum of the French syndical movement both seemed to wane, leading to widespread discussions of a *crise du syndicalisme* by around 1909. In an apparent paradox, the fullest and most coherent theoretical expositions of revolutionary syndicalist doctrine were produced under these circumstances. However, here it can be considered that the logic of “direct action” was opposed in principle to theoretical codification; thus, it was only through a certain decomposition of Amiens logic that a “revolutionary syndicalist” theory could take form at all. The post-Amiens theoretical works of Émile Pouget and other signatories of the “Amiens Charter” can be comprehended in this light.

In the second part of this chapter, this line of interpretation will be extended to another strand of French revolutionary syndicalism – the “new school” (*nouvelle école*) of Georges Sorel. The theoretical work of the Sorelians is often regarded as a political philosophy that developed at an abstract distance from the militant practice of the CGT. It is certainly true that

Sorel's best-known pronouncements on revolutionary syndicalism – in particular, his argument in *Reflections on Violence* (1908) that the proletarian general strike was a “mythic” condensation of Marxism, capable of instilling a revolutionary ethic amongst the workers – had little influence upon the syndical movement or its leaders. However, this chapter will argue that Sorelian theory can be linked to the “decomposition” of French revolutionary syndicalism, in the specific sense conceived above – that is to say, it represented a kind of controlled departure from the strict logic of “direct action,” which paradoxically facilitated the theoretical articulation of revolutionary syndicalist doctrine. In a sense, the writing of the Sorelians, with its ambivalent relationship to CGT activity, was the only possible form that revolutionary syndicalist “theory” could adopt without explicitly contravening the principles of Amiens doctrine.

*

Most of the major works of revolutionary syndicalist “theory” appeared in the period following the Amiens Congress, from around 1906 to 1910. Many were published under the imprint of the *Mouvement socialiste* journal, whose “*Bibliothèque du Mouvement socialiste*” included writings by the CGT leaders Pouget and Griffuelhes as well as by the Sorelian theorists. I will now argue that this burst of theoretical production can be linked to the “decomposition” of Amiens doctrine. This might seem a counter-intuitive claim, given that these works were undoubtedly the fullest and highest expression of “French revolutionary syndicalist” doctrine. I am not suggesting that these writings explicitly rejected or challenged the Amiens standpoint. The key point is rather that the logic of “direct action” was opposed in principle to political “theory.” Prior to Amiens, syndicalist theory could nonetheless be justified as a necessary antidote to parliamentary-socialist propaganda and its pacifying effect upon the workers, which

had yet to be fully eradicated from the syndical movement. However, once the ideological autonomy of the CGT had been officially affirmed, it should have thenceforth been sufficient (according to the logic of “direct action”) for syndicalist propaganda to empirically describe and publicize the practical activity of the CGT’s “conscious minority,” organically drawing the remainder of the proletarian masses into the syndical milieu. In short, the “Amiens Charter” should have marked the end of syndicalist “theory”; a certain decomposition of the Amiens standpoint was thus integral to the theoretical elaboration of revolutionary syndicalism that in fact ensued.

The formal self-contradiction of French revolutionary syndicalism’s “philosophy of action” has been noted by FF Ridley. However, his analysis falls back upon the “rhetorical” interpretation of syndicalist “direct action”:

Clearly, the militant theorists of the movement could not themselves have believed that syndicalism was simply a form of action, for that would have contradicted their own activity as writers and thinkers. ... They nevertheless maintained that syndicalism was characterized by spontaneous action Such remarks, *taken more literally than they deserved* [my emphasis], would force one to conclude that syndicalism really existed on two levels: as a spontaneous form of action in the case of the rank and file; and as a theory about such action in the case of the pamphleteers. ... [P]erhaps one should talk of syndicalism and meta-syndicalism. In practice, however, it is enough to remember that the theorists were making two points: that syndicalist action ought to be largely spontaneous and that syndicalist principles ...

emerged more or less spontaneously from the experience of action.⁴⁹⁶

My argument, of course, is that the seemingly-paradoxical “spontaneity” of French revolutionary syndicalism should indeed be taken “literally.” We have seen how Pouget’s logic of “direct action” was specifically constructed in order to establish an organic unity between the rank-and-file activity and pedagogical doctrine of the syndical movement. In other words, the “two levels” of revolutionary syndicalism were not an accidental consequence of its overreaching rhetoric; to synthesize these “levels” was precisely the task for which the syndicalist “philosophy of action” was engineered.

Accordingly, the revolutionary syndicalists’ “activity as writers and thinkers” was not a purely rhetorical issue, but must be framed as a doctrinal problematic – especially insofar as it threatened the organic synthesis between “rank and file” and “pamphleteers.” This entails asking two questions about the theoretical works produced after Amiens. Firstly, for what reason was it necessary or useful for these writings to exceed the parameters of “direct action,” which in principle called for no more than an empirical description of syndical activity? Secondly, how did these writings maintain the notional unity between syndicalist practice and (meta-)syndicalist theory, which their own existence would seem to contradict? – in other words, how did these works legitimize the act of revolutionary syndicalist writing? (Whether these questions were consciously confronted by the authors of these works, or if they simply represented the structural conditions of their textual production, is a moot point.)

These questions can be applied at the level of individual texts, but I would suggest that two general tendencies of post-Amiens syndicalist theory can also be identified. Firstly, the need for syndicalist theory beyond “direct action” can be linked to a kind of *return to Pelloutier*.

⁴⁹⁶ Ridley, *Revolutionary Syndicalism*, 263.

The separate elements of Pelloutier's revolutionary blueprint – which the organicist-empiricist logic of “direct action” merged into a single, “natural” process of proletarian development – now reasserted themselves as distinct theoretical concerns. In short, both the “general strike” and the “social question” required further syndicalist theorization; their conceptual problems and potentialities had not been exhausted by the revolutionary organicism of Amiens doctrine. Secondly, the legitimization of “revolutionary syndicalist writing” was primarily achieved through an *extension of Pouget's propagandistic logic* into a general condition of revolutionary activity. Broadly speaking, Pouget's pre-Amiens writings implied that the propaganda battle between syndicalism and parliamentary socialism was necessary to eradicate the latter from the syndical movement, thereby liberating the “conscious minority” of the CGT to inspire the proletariat through its “direct action.” For one reason or another, the post-Amiens works of revolutionary syndicalist theory saw a *continued* need for syndicalist doctrine and its negation of preconceived socialist ideas, even though the autonomy of the CGT had already been established.

There were also certain political-historical circumstances that contributed to the decomposition of Amiens doctrine. A degree of malaise set into the French syndical movement after 1906 – several leading syndicalists, including Pouget, were imprisoned for several months in 1908; Pouget and Griffuelhes were respectively deposed from their CGT positions in 1908 and 1909; and syndicalist journals began to discuss a *crise du syndicalisme* from around 1910. As such, the theoretical works published in this period may be viewed as somewhat valedictory in nature, perhaps even as surrogates for “full” syndicalist activity, and their formal departure from the logic of “direct action” may be explained in this way. However, to fully comprehend these texts, it must be recognized that the syndicalist “malaise” merely gave stronger expression to the inherent instability of “revolutionary syndicalism” as a theoretical discourse (as I have attempted to outline). In other words, prior to the emergence of any external political

crisis, the very *writing* of revolutionary syndicalist “theory” was itself inherently problematic, and already implied a certain decomposition of the logic of “direct action.”

A useful illustration of the “decomposition” of revolutionary syndicalism can be found in Victor Griffuelhes’ *Syndicalist Action* (1908), published as part of the “*Bibliothèque du Mouvement socialiste*” series. This majority of this text comprised a collection of articles written by Griffuelhes between 1904 and 1906, which were bookended by two new passages: a preface and a concluding discussion of syndicalist internationalism. The four reproduced articles – on “Syndicalism,” “The General Strike,” “Patriotism,” and “The *Syndicats* and the Socialist Party” – gave a characteristic and succinct representation of Amiens doctrine. Furthermore, they all placed particular emphasis on the doctrinal conflict between revolutionary syndicalism and parliamentary-democratic socialism.

In the “Syndicalism” article, Griffuelhes opposed the “autonomous organization of the working class” to the “sterility of governmental institutions,” declaring that revolutionary syndicalism was “opposed to any reform that does not have the result of augmenting the power of worker action.”⁴⁹⁷ The primary significance of syndicalist “direct action,” through which “the worker himself creates his struggle,” was therefore to “habituate the working class to action and the defence of its interests” – in contradistinction to the passivity encouraged by democratic values.⁴⁹⁸ The “General Strike” article described how the revolutionary general strike would arise as the “ultimate expression” and “generalization” of localized strike activity, and therefore represented “the logical outcome of the constant action of the proletariat” and the “conscious explosion of workers’ efforts towards social transformation.”⁴⁹⁹ Griffuelhes also noted the “force of penetration” that the “idea of general strike” had achieved within “worker

⁴⁹⁷ Griffuelhes, “Le syndicalisme”; *L’action syndicaliste* (Paris: Rivière, 1908), 14; 18; 22.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20-23.

⁴⁹⁹ Griffuelhes, “La grève générale”; *ibid.*, 32-33.

milieux,” overriding the theoretical criticisms of “socialist adversaries” to the tactic.⁵⁰⁰ “Patriotism” was an example of a political value used within bourgeois-capitalist propaganda to divert the proletariat from defending their immediate economic interests. Finally, “The *Syndicats* and the Socialist Party” emphasized how the CGT’s “autonomy” from the “tutelage” of socialism was necessary to avoid syndicalism being “transposed onto the terrain of legality,” which would assign a “fixed limit to worker activity” and replace its “spirit of struggle” with a “spirit of negotiation.”⁵⁰¹

In terms of its content, Griffuelhes’ book was thus an unadulterated expression of the “Amiens” standpoint. However, its textual form implied that Griffuelhes’ body of syndicalist writing retained a certain ideological significance, even though the CGT’s autonomy from socialism had already been achieved. Strictly speaking, this was contradictory to the principles of “direct action.” Thus, *Syndicalist Action* demonstrates the *minimal level of decomposition* that necessarily underlay any “theoretical” articulation of French revolutionary syndicalism after Amiens. Even for a mere reproduction of texts written before Amiens, Griffuelhes had to justify the extension of revolutionary syndicalist doctrine beyond its immediate propagandistic task of freeing the “conscious minority” of the CGT from the influence of parliamentary socialism. In other words, legitimate grounds had to be established for the theoretical *afterlife* of these syndicalist writings, beyond their direct, practical function for the syndical movement.

The two “new” sections of the text can be shown to have responded to this problem. In his preface to the book, Griffuelhes conceived a broader purpose for revolutionary syndicalist writing. He continued to emphasize the organicist nature of syndicalist doctrine; it rejected theretical “formulae” or “speculative and abstract solutions,” and instead solely consisted of “methods of struggle that are the exclusive domain of the working class.” However, the

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 27.

⁵⁰¹ Griffuelhes, “Les syndicats et le parti socialiste”; *ibid.*, 47-48.

revolutionary syndicalist elucidation of these organic “methods of struggle” was no longer merely conceived as a way of *popularizing* these methods – that is, to spread them from a pioneering “conscious minority” to a wider proletarian mass – but rather as an essential element of “worker practice” as such. In their immediate form, the methods of workers’ struggle “appear chaotic because [they are] disorganized, [and] incoherent because [they are] still poorly perceived and therefore poorly set out.” It was therefore necessary for “militants to better conceive” these methods and express them in a form “more apt to be made known” – not, of course, by imposing abstract theoretical principles, but by illuminating the “*raison d’être*” and “justification” of organic worker activity: “Is the role of the militant not to draw out an indication from worker practice, giving its activity the emphasis [*relief*] and authority that it requires? This is what led me to write the articles that follow.”⁵⁰²

The key point here is that revolutionary syndicalist doctrine was not merely called upon to negate the parliamentary-socialist values that had diverted the proletariat away from their “natural” economic struggle. Griffuelhes’ preface also implied that the immediate form of workers’ struggle was fundamentally “chaotic” and “incoherent,” and thus required a certain form of militant writing in order to clarify its principles. In other words, the role of syndicalist doctrine was not merely to clear an ideological space for the CGT’s “direct action,” but also to facilitate the development of proletarian action as such. Griffuelhes still insisted that revolutionary syndicalism was the organic “result of a long practice created more by events than by particular individuals” – not “the expression of a science or a formula, but the result of continuous efforts.”⁵⁰³ His implication was that “militant” syndicalist writing was an integral, intellectual component of worker “practice,” rather than an external theoretical representation; it simply drew out the immanent principles that were already present in the historical evolution

⁵⁰² Griffuelhes, “Avant-propos”; *ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

of syndical activity. This argument was underpinned by Griffuelhes' outline of the three "phases traversed by worker practice" since the establishment of the *syndicats*: initially, the workers were "for the independence of syndicats," but did not seek the "independence of the syndical movement" from socialism in a broader sense; in the second phase, there was an increasing "reaction of the working class against the demoralizing influence of political action upon the *syndicats*"; finally, the third phase was characterized by "the reaction of the *syndicats* against democracy."⁵⁰⁴ In short, syndicalist "practice" had increasingly moved towards a particular ideological standpoint, and Griffuelhes' writing was simply a continuation and clarification of this tendency: "It is from the *syndicat* that I have drawn all my force of action, and it is in this way that my ideas began to take shape."⁵⁰⁵

The necessary "decomposition" of Amiens doctrine that underlay Griffuelhes' "theoretical" writing can thus be summarized as follows: the strict logic of "direct action" entailed that syndicalist propaganda would publicize the revolutionary action of a "conscious minority," whose exemplary revolutionary will would then inspire other workers to use the methods naturally at their disposal to pursue their immediate interests; by Griffuelhes' logic, syndicalist writing also had to clarify the immanent "*raison d'être*" of these methods, rooted in the evolution of the French syndical movement towards a certain ideological consciousness. In the former case, the significance of syndicalist "direct action" lay purely in its *replicability* by other workers, in terms of both its specific methods and its general revolutionary spirit. In the latter case, the significance of "direct action" incorporated a further *historical* element – it was not only a replicable example of autonomous worker activity, but also a historic demonstration of *how proletarian consciousness could arise through the autonomous evolution of worker practice*.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 4-6.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 8.

The concluding section of *Syndicalist Action* – a discussion of syndicalist internationalism, partly based upon a speech that Griffuelhes had given to a 1907 conference held by *Mouvement socialiste* – can also be linked to this subtle shift in emphasis. Griffuelhes began by asserting the “originality of French syndicalism ... within the syndical International,” particularly compared to “German syndicalism,” which “has a conception of syndical action that ... makes worker organizations into the vassals of political parties.”⁵⁰⁶ Since the 1896 London Congress of the Second International, the French syndicalists had viewed German Social Democracy as the epitome of “authoritarian” parliamentary socialism. After Amiens, the revolutionary syndicalists could now consider the possibility of directly combatting the SPD’s international influence by establishing a rival, syndicalist International with the autonomous CGT as its spearhead. This had two key implications for what I am calling the “decomposition” of Amiens doctrine. Firstly, it extended the battle against Guesdists within the French syndical movement into an international battle against Social Democracy; thus, the doctrinal conflict between syndicalism and socialism did not end when the autonomy of the CGT was realized, and revolutionary syndicalists had a reason to continue writing ideological propaganda. Secondly, the international exemplarity of the CGT’s “direct action” was not restricted to its methodology and revolutionary *élan* being replicated by other workers; the significance of the CGT was also to demonstrate a *viable historical path towards proletarian autonomy* as might eventually be replicated by other nations such as Germany. In short, the revolutionary syndicalists’ turn towards internationalism provided a major justification for the “theoretical afterlife” of their propagandistic writings.

I have suggested that the decomposition of Amiens doctrine prompted a return to the two distinct concerns of Pelloutier’s syndicalism, the “defence” and “study” of workers’ interests:

⁵⁰⁶ Griffuelhes, “L’Internationale syndicale”; *ibid.*, 52-53.

on one hand, the organic “generalization” of localized forms of worker resistance into the general strike; on the other, the pedagogical synthesis of anarchist ideas and syndical association in response to the “social question.” This hypothesis can now be given firmer parameters. As previously outlined, the logic of “direct action” amalgamated these aspects of Pelloutier’s vision, unifying all forms of organic proletarian resistance as “social facts” to be elucidated and propagated by syndicalist journalism. In other words, syndicalist “defence” (the element of economic resistance) and syndicalist “study” (the element of social education) were both subsumed within a dynamic of empirical popularization, through which the proletarian masses would simply reproduce the “direct action” of the CGT’s “conscious minority.” In this framework, the “generalization” of strike activity and the “socialization” of libertarian values both became a simple matter of replication – the replication of a method in the former case, the replication of individual revolutionary *élan* in the latter. However, once revolutionary syndicalist doctrine moved beyond Amiens, and “direct action” took on an additional layer of “historical” significance, the specific mechanics of “generalized” strike activity and “socialized” anarchist ideology regained theoretical relevance, as ways of explaining how conscious proletarian autonomy could develop immanently from worker practice. Amiens doctrine had dispensed with the problem of how “direct action” would be communicated to the workers, but the problem of how it *originated* – that is, how “chaotic” worker practice could evolve into a “conscious” movement without external, preconceived principles – reappeared as a theme of post-Amiens syndicalist theory.

In this light, we can consider Pouget’s 1909 text *How We Shall Make the Revolution* (co-authored with Émile Pataud), an idiosyncratic fictional account of a syndicalist revolution. This text’s formal departure from Amiens logic may be linked to external factors of decomposition – notably, it was published shortly after Pouget’s deposition as CGT vice-secretary. However, I would argue that its specific argumentation can only be fully

comprehended in relation to the intrinsic decomposition whose parameters I have begun to sketch out. *How We Shall Make the Revolution* was an speculative account of the future revolution, which verged on science fiction in its description of the military technology through which the post-revolutionary French regime would defeat the forces of foreign reaction. The fictional genre of the text meant that it could be easily disassociated from the main body of syndicalist doctrine and framed as an imaginative flight of fancy, defusing the potential contradiction of representing “direct action” through a “preconceived idea” of revolutionary transformation. Jennings has suggested that the text “provides an insight into the wilder and incautious hopes and aspirations” of the revolutionary syndicalists, as well as “the rudiments of an ethical theory ... at the basis of much syndicalist writing,” especially in its depiction of a harmonious future society rooted in “[m]an’s natural sociability.”⁵⁰⁷ (This “ethical” aspect of the text was clearly indebted to anarchist thought.) However, it is worth noting that Pouget and Pataud’s work gave particular attention to two points closely linked to the main strands of Pelloutier’s syndicalism: firstly, the spontaneous outbreak of the general strike; secondly, the workers’ intellectual capacity to take over social production.

In the opening chapters of the text, Pouget and Pataud described how the general strike would quickly spread from a single incident – the response to a government massacre of protesting workers in Paris – into a revolutionary situation encompassing the whole nation. Although the activity of the syndical movement was mentioned as an important factor in readying the “consciousness” of the “popular mass” for this action, it was secondary in importance to a spontaneous dynamic of popular sentiment and solidarity.⁵⁰⁸ The narrative emphasized the accelerating influence of “popular indignation”: “The people are imbued with such a profound sentiment of pity for the victims of Power and so intense is their anger ... that

⁵⁰⁷ Jennings, *Syndicalism in France*, 53.

⁵⁰⁸ Émile Pouget & Émile Pataud, *Comment nous ferons la Révolution* (Paris: Tallendier, 1909), 9.

they throw themselves into the strike with relief and satisfaction.”⁵⁰⁹ It was only in the context of this general mood of social unrest that syndical actions were readily adopted and replicated by the masses. This was in line with Pelloutier’s 1895 discussion of the tactic, which had insisted upon the impossibility of organizing the general strike beyond a degree of propagandistic preparation.

Subsequently, having depicted the triumph of the revolutionary general strike and the downfall of bourgeois capitalism, a chapter entitled “The Organization of Production” described how the *syndicats* would take over the productive functions of society:

The *syndicats* that, within capitalist society, had been groups of combat, turn into groups of production and ... set to the reorganization of labour. For the most part, they are not caught unawares; previous discussions and dissertations, in congresses [and] in corporative journals, as well as the popularization of socialist and anarchist ideas, have given their militants an idea of the tasks and operations to be carried out in the eventuality.

Thus, the *syndicats* of each industry, of each profession, takes possession of their relevant factories and workshops.⁵¹⁰

Here it was notable that Pouget and Pataud invoked “socialist and anarchist ideas” regarding social production – but not “syndicalist” ideas. In this regard, the discourse of syndicalist “congresses” and “journals” did not constitute a new doctrine, but rather directed existing ideas towards the specific task of preparing the workers for the management of social production.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 21.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 153.

Again, this can be seen as a return to Pelloutier's view of the educational role of syndical associations in relation to the "social question," which made them a "practical school" for "libertarian socialist" values.

These moments in the narrative of *How We Shall Make the Revolution* can be seen as theoretical elaborations of two key assertions in the "Amiens Charter": firstly, that the essential "means" of proletarian struggle was the general strike; secondly, that the *syndicats* would naturally transition from "groups of resistance" in the "present" to "groups of production" in the "future." Pouget and Pataud's narrative gave a firmer grounding to both assertions, showing how these facets of the syndicalist revolution could develop organically in the context of proletarian struggle, using similar arguments to those developed by Pelloutier. The unusual format of the text can thus be viewed in a different light – it can be asked why these elaborations of the Amiens standpoint could only be expressed in an outlandish, fictional text outside the main body of revolutionary syndicalist writing. This can be understood in terms of the intrinsic decomposition of French revolutionary syndicalism. In order to depict the organic *development* (not merely to assert the organic *nature*) of the revolutionary syndicalist struggle, Pouget had to separate the two aspects that his journalistic logic of "direct action" had amalgamated. On one hand, the generalization of syndicalist methods now rested upon an external dynamic of revolutionary contagion, rooted in a popular mood of solidarity and anti-authoritarian sentiment. On the other, the capacity of the workers to take up the reins of social production rested upon "anarchist and socialist" ideas being propagated to workers through the pedagogical activity of syndicalist organizations. Neither of these processes required the propagandistic dynamic that underlay the writing of Amiens doctrine – that is, the liberation of the CGT's "conscious minority" from democratic ideas, allowing its "direct action" to be replicated by the proletarian masses.

Thus, in *How We Shall Make the Revolution*, the ideological “autonomy” of the CGT no longer formed the crucial link between syndicalist “defence” and syndicalist “study,” which gave Amiens doctrine its coherence and validity. Instead, Pouget and Pataud’s narrative established a new and somewhat amorphous connection between these aspects of syndicalism, which can arguably be linked to Pataud’s role as leader of the electricity workers’ union. During the popular “generalization” of strike activity, emphasis was placed on the “spontaneous” *mass communication* that could occur within a situation of revolutionary unrest:

In [an] overexcited atmosphere, which incubated and kindled hatred against the employers and the government, the news was propagated, with the spontaneity of an electric discharge, ... of the drama that had ... stained the pavement of the grand boulevards with the blood of the workers.⁵¹¹

The generalization of strike activity was subsequently linked to the same dynamic of spontaneous communication: the “strike committees” of individual “factories” and “workshops” simultaneously came to the conclusion “that proletarian solidarity must be manifested through the complete cessation of labour ... *without waiting for syndical organizations to give the signal* [my emphasis],” and this decision “was propagated by spontaneous vibrations, by tacit accord.”⁵¹² Clearly, there was no question here of the proletarian masses replicating the activity of the CGT, nor of syndicalist propaganda playing a leading role in the “propagation” of direct action; the general strike developed in a wholly organic fashion.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 11.

⁵¹² Ibid., 13-14.

However, Pouget and Pataud's use of "electricity" as a metaphorical figure for this spontaneous mass communication obtained a stronger significance as the narrative developed, which would partly restore the significance of syndicalist activity. A key role in the general strike was performed by the electricity and gas workers, to which a separate chapter was dedicated with the title: "Darkness falls!" This referred to the dramatic moment when these workers would suspend their labour, leading to the "complete and instantaneous extinction" of Paris' street lighting and power supply.⁵¹³ Furthermore, acts of sabotage in the power stations would ensure that an emergency military workforce would be unable to restore these amenities – leading, of course, to bourgeois demoralization and capitalist panic. The key point here was that modern social life relied upon proletarian labour and expertise, particularly in domains involving the general circulation or dispersion of a centralized production-process. Pouget and Pataud's moment of "darkness" dramatized Pelloutier's notion of turning the capitalist "division of labour" against itself.

Aside from public amenities, the other area of industry fitting this profile was that of *communication*. The morning after the suspension of electricity, Pouget and Pataud's narrative described how "newspapers" would not appear, postal and telegraph workers would suspend their labour, and the telephone lines would not function.⁵¹⁴ However, a route of communication would remain open for the workers: whilst the majority of the press would be unable to function, the "methods of publicity" used by "syndical organizations" would continue to operate, and "the journal of the CGT" would "appear punctually" to "neutralize alarmist rumours within public opinion."⁵¹⁵ Syndicalist journalism could rely upon the continued support of proletarian labour, differentiating it from the bourgeois-capitalist technologies of communication. Thus, although CGT journalism would not play a directing role in the revolutionary general strike, it

⁵¹³ Ibid., 38.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 45.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 63.

was a direct *expression* of the proletarian “spontaneity” that underlay this revolutionary action. The pivotal role of the proletariat in modern social life meant that its “spontaneous” general strike would effectuate a political-economic subversion of bourgeois-capitalist production, and the propagandistic writing of the CGT epitomized this subversion at the level of journalistic production.

Furthermore, the industrial expertise allowing the workers to shut down bourgeois-capitalist society would, from this perspective, be identical or directly analogous to the knowledge required for directing post-revolutionary social production. We can thus see how the example of the electricity workers’ “direct action” formed a new link – partly mediated by the *metaphorical* figure of “electricity,” hence requiring an imaginative textual format – between the organic generalization of revolutionary action and the social-pedagogical role of the syndical organizations. Overall, this argument returned to Pelloutier’s conception of the general strike as an “apotheosis of productive force” through which the capitalist “division of labour” would be transformed into a revolutionary weapon.

We can summarize the trajectory of French revolutionary syndicalism outlined thus far. Initially, Pelloutier developed separate conceptions of syndicalist “defence” – the organic generalization of strike activity, arising through autonomous worker activity – and syndicalist “study” – the social education of the workers, based upon the use of syndical associations as a “practical schools” for anarchist “social” ideals. The separation of these logics can be attributed to the fact that, in his original conception, Pelloutier saw the syndical movement as a new phase of socialist activity; the socialist project would thus have formed an infrastructural link between the general strike as a method of resistance and the *Bourses du travail* as an organizational basis for worker pedagogy. However, following the Guesdists’ rejection of the general strike, Pelloutier was forced to elaborate the elements of “defence” and “study” as autonomous

processes, linked only in a broad conceptual fashion by their subversion of the liberal-republican *loi Waldeck-Rousseau*.

In his writings leading up to Amiens, Pouget's conception of syndicalist "direct action" amalgamated these elements – in effect, subsuming the organicism of syndicalist "defence" to the ideological-institutional synthesis of syndicalist "study." "Direct action" construed all forms of proletarian resistance (including the general strike) as "social facts," which could be studied empirically and popularized through syndicalist journalism. This resulted in an all-encompassing synthesis between the "organic" ideology of syndicalism and the "autonomous" institution of the CGT, which effectively allowed the syndicalist movement itself to perform the role of the socialist infrastructure in Pelloutier's original conception. We have seen how this form of syndicalist doctrine developed in response to the sharpening antagonism of revolutionary syndicalism and parliamentary socialism.

After Amiens, a different approach was necessary in order to establish the *historical* or *developmental* significance of "direct action." Pouget and Pataud's narrative achieved this by reversing the priority of "defence" and "study." The organic logic of strike generalization was now imaginatively extended to incorporate syndicalist pedagogy; the latter was linked to the "spontaneity" of the former through the metaphorical figure of "electricity," which epitomized the nature of modern social production. The popular-empirical logic of syndicalist doctrine and the "conscious minority" of the autonomous CGT receded from the picture, and Pelloutier's political-economic subversion of capitalism became the central tenet of revolutionary syndicalism in this context.

My account of French revolutionary syndicalism has thus far focused on the writings of the CGT militants, and has drawn a clear distinction between their work prior to and in the wake of the Amiens Congress. This is something of an interpretive artifice – it would be more accurate to state that the two logics epitomized by the "formation" and "decomposition" of

Pouget's syndicalist doctrine co-existed ambivalently within revolutionary syndicalist discourse throughout its development. For most of its historical trajectory, the element of "decomposition" was represented by the Sorelian "new school."

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Existing analyses of Georges Sorel's *nouvelle école* fall into three broad categories: firstly, those which approach Sorelian "revolutionary syndicalism" as an idiosyncratic variety of Marxist theory; secondly, those which frame syndicalism as a particular phase in Sorel's broader individual development as a thinker; thirdly, those which focus on the relationship between the Sorelian school and the "Amiens" militants. Broadly speaking, the existing scholarship has treated the last of these themes as subordinate to the former two. In other words, Sorel's theoretical convergence with the CGT leadership (reaching its height from around 1904 to 1908) has usually been explained on the basis that "revolutionary syndicalism" was able to perform a certain function in relation to Sorel's broader theoretical concerns – in particular, his unorthodox reimagination of Marxism. This interpretation naturally tends to represent the relationship between CGT syndicalism and Sorelian syndicalism as an ephemeral link, and moreover to conceive Sorel's syndicalist standpoint as a kind of distorted version of the "pure" Amiens doctrine – a Marxian elaboration upon the logic of "direct action," entailing certain supplementary additions (such as the theory of general strike as "myth") and differences in emphasis. Sorel's academic distance from the practical activity of the syndical movement is often invoked as a key factor in this regard:

Sorel's exposition of the philosophy of syndicalism contains little
that cannot be found in less sophisticated form in the writings of

other syndicalists ... which emphasized class struggle, direct action, the general strike, ... and the avoidance of the practices of parliamentary democracy Unlike these writers, Sorel's actual involvement in the day-to-day running of the syndicalist movement was minimal. He largely confined his activities to the periodical *Le Mouvement socialiste* ... [beyond which his] influence was negligible.⁵¹⁶

Without questioning that this is a valid interpretation of Sorel's contribution to revolutionary syndicalism, my analysis will explore the possibility of directly approaching the relationship between Amiens doctrine and Sorelian theory, by linking Sorel's writings to the "decomposition" of French revolutionary syndicalism, particularly in terms of its "return to Pelloutier." Sorel struck up an association with Pelloutier in the late 1890s, contributing articles to Pelloutier's *L'Ouvrier des deux mondes* journal, extolling the *Bourses du travail* in his brochure *The Socialist Future of the Syndicats* (1898), and providing a preface to the posthumous publication of Pelloutier's *History of the Bourses du travail* in 1902. By closely examining this association, Sorelian discourse can be understood as an everpresent aspect of "decomposition" within French revolutionary syndicalism – a controlled departure from the strict logic of "direct action," which performed a key articulatory function. Through this line of analysis, it will be possible to form some conclusions regarding the development of Sorel's idiosyncratic Marxism *in light of his syndicalism*, rather than the other way round.

Sorel's initial engagement with syndicalism is often linked to his disillusionment with Marxist "scientific socialism." Jeremy Jennings provides a comprehensive account along these lines. In his early writings, Sorel seemed to espouse the objective validity of Marxist social

⁵¹⁶ JR Jennings, *Georges Sorel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1985), 118.

theory; however, he “quickly distanced himself ... from the ‘orthodox’ interpretation of Marxism as a science capable of providing predictive knowledge of future societal development” and thus “began a reinterpretation of Marxism that was to lead eventually to his espousal of syndicalism.” Specifically, Sorel sought to redefine Marxism “as an ethical doctrine,” which would provide the ideological support for a “moral struggle in which an ethically vigorous working class would overturn the values of bourgeois society.” Thus, the autonomous syndical movement was conceived by Sorel as a means of generating a “new code of morality” within the working class – instilling a “personal sense of responsibility” by allowing “workers to direct their own affairs ... free from the tutelage of intellectuals.”⁵¹⁷ The affinities between Sorel’s neo-Marxism and syndicalist “direct action” were thus clear. However, it is worth noting that Sorel viewed solidaristic “strike activity” as particularly apt for the “moral and technical education of the proletariat,” whilst he opposed certain other modes of direct action such as sabotage.⁵¹⁸ In this sense, Sorel’s conception of the general strike retained a specific doctrinal significance; in Sorelian discourse, the class-forming qualities of the proletarian “general strike” were never wholly subsumed by the broader dynamic of syndicalist popularization – as they were, at least in principle, within Amiens doctrine. This was one of the main ways in which Sorel’s theory offered revolutionary syndicalists a path of “controlled departure” from the strict popular-empirical logic of “direct action.”

Sorel’s syndicalist turn was initially inspired by the achievements of the British trade unions. In *Socialist Future*, Sorel noted the “moral progress realized under the influence of trade-unionism” in Britain and specifically cited the spread of teetotalism, which he claimed could not be achieved through “legislation” alone and required the moralizing effects of comradely activity.⁵¹⁹ However, as Jennings notes, he subsequently “transferred his praise to

⁵¹⁷ Jennings, *Syndicalism in France*, 57-62.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁵¹⁹ Georges Sorel, “L’avenir socialiste des syndicats”; *Matériaux d’une théorie de prolétariat* (Paris: Rivière, 1919), 129.

Pelloutier's *bourse du travail* movement" and its "new type of ... unbureaucratic and decentralized" organization.⁵²⁰ This shift would seem to be the clearest mark of Pelloutier's influence upon Sorel. The concluding chapter of Pelloutier's *History of the Bourses du travail* emphasized how "purely professional action, ... of which the old English unionism offers the typical example," had been superseded by "the concerted action of diverse professions," as represented by the *Bourses*; furthermore, the large membership and strong organization of the British unions had instilled them with a "mixture of pride and a spirit of conservation" that "guarded them against any spontaneous act of energy."⁵²¹ In his preface to the *History*, Sorel endorsed Pelloutier's view: "Pelloutier had the very great merit of understanding that it was possible ... to realize a truly new type of organization and to break from imitations of the bourgeois tradition."⁵²² This valorization of Pelloutier was sustained in Sorel's later writings, most notably in *The Decomposition of Marxism* (1908), which crystallized his attempt to sever Marxist theory from social-democratic orthodoxy. As one of the first militants within the workers' movement to recognize "the necessity ... of founding socialism upon an absolute separation of classes," Pelloutier had played a key role in the "renaissance of the revolutionary idea" upon which the thinkers of the "new school" based their "purification of Marxism."⁵²³

Viewed in this light, Sorel's turn towards "syndicalism" would seem to be wholly subordinate to the underlying development of his "Marxism." For a certain period of time, the contemporary syndical movement offered a potential *practical* approach to the fundamental *theoretical* problematic at the root of Sorel's writing – that is, the construction of a proletarian "morality" in accordance with the revolutionary spirit of Marx. Pelloutier's main influence upon Sorel was to specify the precise nature of this "practical approach," supplanting the model of the British trade unions with his revolutionary conception of *Bourses du travail*. From this

⁵²⁰ Jennings, *Syndicalism in France*, 64.

⁵²¹ Pelloutier, *Histoire*, 259-60.

⁵²² Georges Sorel, "Préface"; Pelloutier, *Histoire*, 59.

⁵²³ Georges Sorel, *La décomposition du marxisme* (Paris: Rivière, 1908), 56-57.

perspective, the theoretical interaction between Sorel's Marxism and Pelloutier's syndicalism was quite limited; it would seem more accurate to state that the former made an instrumental use of the latter. For Irving Horowitz, "Pelloutier ... offer[ed] a concrete manifestation of a pure radicalism, unsullied by the dogmas of Marxians from whom [Sorel] was seeking intellectual escape The *Bourses* gave practicality and operational validity to Sorel's vision of a dynamic and morally pure working class growing in revolutionary strength outside and against the State."⁵²⁴

However, I will now attempt to outline an alternative interpretation, which will suggest that the theoretical affinities between Pelloutier and Sorel were more significant than existing accounts imply. As such, my analysis will challenge the absolute separation between Marxist "theory" and syndical "practice" that has tended to govern most readings of Sorel's syndicalist phase. I will begin by suggesting that the development of Sorel's thought was constitutively shaped by a conception of sociopolitical "crisis" that *preceded* his reinterpretation of Marxism, and to which his syndicalist turn can be linked. I will then argue that Sorel's treatment of "scientific socialism" was not simply a matter of rejecting orthodox Marxist dogmas, but also involved a more fundamental logic of worker autodidacticism. This constituted a direct point of ideological affinity between Sorel's "Marxism" and Pelloutier's writings on the "social question."

Sorel's "Science and Socialism" (1893), a short letter printed in the *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, has often been invoked as a mark of Sorel's early orthodoxy as an enthusiastic "disciple of Marx" and his theory of capitalist development.⁵²⁵ In fact, Sorel's position was more nuanced:

⁵²⁴ Irving Louis Horowitz, *Radicalism and the Revolt Against Reason* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1968), 28.

⁵²⁵ Zeev Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 39.

Modern socialism believes that there exists a science, a true economic science. Is this thesis well-founded? Here is what must be examined a little more closely that has been done up to now; I do not believe that the theories of Marx have really been refuted from this point of view.

Thus, Sorel did not assert the scientific validity of Marxism, but identified it as an important area for further speculative inquiry. Here the “philosophical” nature of the publication to which Sorel had written his letter was significant. Sorel argued that the “capital question” of whether Marx had indeed founded a new science (a question to which he had “for a long time ... s[ought], in vain, the solution”) was fundamentally a “problem ... of philosophical order,” but one that most philosophers had neglected due to their reflexive resistance to socialism. Without himself expressing any kind of certainty over the validity of Marx’s “economic science,” Sorel called upon philosophers to assess the scientificity of Marxism – and, accordingly, the claims of “modern socialism” – in a more serious fashion than they had hitherto attempted.⁵²⁶ To support this call to philosophers, Sorel’s text had to elaborate two broader arguments: firstly, it had to establish *how and why the existing philosophical arguments against Marx were superficial and inadequate*; secondly, it had to outline *the potential benefits of Marxist science were it to be proven philosophically sound*. It may be noted that neither of these arguments were concerned with the integral content of Marxist theory – only its sociopolitical context and potential function as a social philosophy. Nonetheless, I would contend that these arguments established some key parameters for the subsequent development of Sorel’s theory.

⁵²⁶ Georges Sorel, “Science et socialisme”; *Revue philosophique de la France et de l’étranger* 18.5 (May 1893), 510-11.

Existing philosophical arguments against Marx were, Sorel claimed, prejudiced by their automatic enmity towards socialism: “The philosophers detest the socialists; they only speak of them with a poorly-disguised irritability.” Significantly, Sorel linked this prejudice to the fact that Marx was closely associated with “German socialism,” which “without doubt employs reprehensible methods for its propaganda.” Whilst admitting the validity of criticisms aimed at the SPD, Sorel’s key point was that Marxist thought could not be summarily dismissed on the same basis. This was applied to the common criticism of Marx’s “obscurity,” which suggested that his “enigmatic” Hegelian language was the sole basis of Marxism’s political “force.” Sorel insisted that Marx should not be accused of the same propagandistic cunning as the German Social Democrats; his obscurity was rather a reflection of the difficulty of the subject that he addressed: “It is not the fault of Marx if social problems are complicated.” This argument was extended into a broader point concerning the nature of socialism:

For many people, socialism is nothing but a form of Jacobinism: learned people believe that the social question is a *pretext* for sharing out the spoils of the bourgeois [Indeed,] socialism is *exploited* by the Jacobins and it is a great pity – but also the Jacobins are the only ones who come to its aid; and without them could any legislative concessions have been obtained?

In other words, by reflexively dismissing the validity of the “social question” that underlay the demands of the socialist movement, philosophers had left it open to exploitation by fanatical and destructive “Jacobins” – whose consequent dominance of socialism served to reinforce prejudices against socialism. The fact that, even under these circumstances, socialism had achieved certain legislative reforms was an indication that it held a potential kernel of social

rationality. It was therefore necessary for “learned people” to look beyond the contingent Jacobinism of the socialist movement, and to recognize its underlying essence as a social theory – which Marx had *perhaps* given a scientific expression. Distinguishing the potential validity of Marxist science from the cynical propaganda of German Social Democracy was central to the philosophical reassessment of modern socialism demanded by Sorel.⁵²⁷

Sorel proceeded to outline the sociopolitical benefits of Marxist science *were it to be proven as valid*. Initially, he presented a straightforward rationalist argument: “Socialism claims to establish, today, an economic science; if this claim is well-founded, it has the right to demand the legislative reformation of the State; its theorems must be applied; that which *is rational and demonstrated must become real*.” This faith in the sociopolitical applicability of “rational science” would, of course, be abandoned by Sorel in his later writings. However, the speculative nature of Sorel’s early rationalism must be emphasized – again, he did not express any certainty over the “claims” of Marx’s “economic science,” but saw it as an imperative task to ascertain whether or not these claims were valid. The crux of Sorel’s early “scientific socialism” was not an orthodox belief in Marxist principles, but rather a speculative hope that Marxism – if in fact proven to be an authentic “science” – could provide a resolution to what he saw as an *intellectual crisis* within modern society. The root cause of this crisis was a contemporary mood of relativistic scepticism:

... that which *is rational and demonstrated must become real*. I know well that this absolute formula may seem outmoded today [A]ccording to current opinion ... science is nothing but a construction of our minds [*esprit*], more or less adapted to real things, but never completely adapted: any absolute

⁵²⁷ Ibid., 509-10.

conclusion is thus forbidden to mankind. This sceptical conclusion has become that of the economists; moralists still protest ... but they have great difficulty in maintaining their position on old terrain; almost all are obliged to make concessions to the new doctrines.⁵²⁸

Here the opposition between “economists” and “moralists” should be highlighted. As already noted, Sorel’s later writings sought to reformulate Marxism as a moral creed rather than an economic doctrine – a project that is generally linked to his anti-deterministic rejection of “scientific socialism.” However, in “Science and Socialism,” the same opposition between the “economic” and the “moral” seemed to hold the inverse significance. Modern “economists” were the group of thinkers who epitomized the anti-scientific relativism of the period, whereas the “moralists” were those seeking to hold on to the traditional standards of absolute truth. From this perspective, proving the validity of Marx’s “economic science” would represent a victory for the moralists rather than the economists – in effect, it would prove the sceptical economists wrong upon their own terrain.

Sorel’s hope that Marxist “science” would reestablish the moral certainties destabilized by modern relativism was not rooted in any sure conviction that the sceptical position was misguided, nor that the absolute truths of traditional rationality were indeed valid. Rather, his position was that the disappearance of these absolute truths had engendered a sociopolitical crisis, for which Marxism *could* provide a solution *if* it indeed proved to be a science. The specific nature of this crisis was closely linked to the aforementioned Jacobinism of the socialist movement:

⁵²⁸ Ibid., 510.

Is it not an admirable spectacle to see the plebeians [*plèbe*] remain true to the old principles, to still believe in *absolute* right and truth, when those who should lead [the people] no longer believe in [those principles]? Scientific scepticism continually aggravates the separation of classes, from a moral point of view. The most learned lose all active influence [*action*] upon the march of minds [*esprits*], and society courts the greatest danger, because the guidance of souls is almost entirely abandoned to agitators. The people go with them, because they suppose [the agitators to hold] the same faith that animates themselves.⁵²⁹

Modern scepticism meant that “learned” intellectuals could no longer guide the social progress of the “common people,” who remained committed to “absolute” principles rather than indulging in relativistic subtleties – a “separation of classes” was thus emerging between intellectuals and the people. This left the field open for demagogic or Jacobinist “agitators” – such as the feckless propagandists of German Social Democracy – to mislead the people by cynically pretending to share their belief in “absolute right and truth.” However, if the new “economic science” of Marx could be reclaimed by philosophers and elaborated as the basis of a new morality, then the sociopolitical crisis engendered by the intellectual fashion of scepticism would be averted. This was the true nature of Sorel’s initial commitment to “scientific socialism.”

This reading places Sorel’s subsequent theoretical development in a new light, and helps to explain some of the perplexities and ambiguities of his standpoint. Within existing interpretations, Sorel’s rejection of Marxism’s “scientific” validity is usually seen as the root

⁵²⁹ Ibid., 510-11.

conviction from which the key elements of his theory derived: firstly, his antipathy towards German Social Democracy, from which the true spirit Marxism had to be extracted; secondly, his pursuit of a “moral” rather than “economic” form of Marxism; thirdly, the notion of an unbridgeable gulf between intellectuals and the masses. However, we have now seen that these elements were already present in Sorel’s writing at a point when he was explicitly pinning his hopes upon the rational “economic science” of Marxism. The relativistic scepticism of modern “economists” had created a “moral” separation between the “learned” and “plebeian” classes, which left the latter open to political exploitation by socialist demagogues. In short, the conceptual parameters that would later define Sorelian Marxism were established *before* he had rejected the rationalist claims of “scientific socialism,” in the shape of a *sociopolitical crisis of philosophy*.

As such, Sorel’s reinvention of Marxism should not necessarily be viewed as the essential motivation behind his theoretical development; his departure from “scientific socialism” was not the absolute origin of his standpoint, but a secondary factor that affected his response to the contemporary “crisis” of relativism. It is crucial to recognize that both the demagoguery of German Social Democracy and the decadence of modern intellectuals were initially conceived as aspects of this philosophical crisis, rather than as problems inherent to “orthodox Marxism.” They were not necessarily linked to the dogmatism of “scientific socialism,” but represented distinct sociopolitical problems in their own right. In other words, Sorel’s standpoint did not begin from a fundamental opposition to Marxist orthodoxy and its purely economic conception of class struggle, which was then extended into a critique of German Social Democracy and intellectuals in general. Rather, the fact that Marxism could not be proven as scientifically valid meant that the fundamental problems of moral relativism and cynical “Jacobinism” were left unresolved – and dogmatic Marxist orthodoxy was the *consequence* of this situation.

Once Sorel's speculative hopes for Marxism as an "economic science" were extinguished, the "separation of classes" between the intellectuals and plebeians became irreparable – there was no prospect of a new rationality to bridge across this "moral" chasm. Without any means of enlightened intellectual guidance, it would seem that the "danger" of the masses falling into the grip of fanatical demagogues was inescapable. However, Sorel's conception of the "crisis" left one potential avenue open – namely, that the plebeian class would be able to enlighten itself through an autodidactic process, cast off the corrupting influence of Social Democratic propaganda, and take over the role of social leadership from a decadent intelligentsia. The "admirable spectacle" of the "common people remain[ing] true to the old principles" could become the autonomous basis for a new morality. Under these circumstances, there would no longer be any need for Marxist science to restore the intellectuals' faith in absolute values and, accordingly, their moral capacity to lead society; the rise of the plebeian class would bridge this gap from the opposite direction. Crucially, this autodidactic logic was not dependent upon Sorel's reformulation of Marxism; it was a possibility already implicit in his conception of the contemporary sociopolitical crisis.

Sorel's turn towards syndicalism can thus be linked to the crisis of absolute moral principles. This was evident in *Socialist Future*, when Sorel argued that it was imperative for the syndical movement to retain the elements of mutuality and education upon which its "moralizing" effect depended:

[T]o reduce the *syndicats* into nothing more than societies of resistance is to place a formidable barrier before the development of the proletariat; it is to expose [them] to the preponderant influence of bourgeois demagogues ... ; it is to prevent them from

elaborating, in conformity with their own way of life, the new principles of their right [*droit*]; it is, in a word, to refuse them the possibility of becoming a class *for themselves*.

Existing interpretations generally recognize that, for Sorel, the autonomous development of the proletariat went hand-in-hand with the formation of a new morality; however, this new moral code is usually linked to a militant ethic of Marxist class struggle. However, it can now be seen that Sorel's fundamental conception of sociopolitical "crisis" gave a certain shape to the moral development of the proletariat, prior to any notion of outright class conflict. From this perspective, the fundamental purpose of syndical organization was not to prepare the workers for struggle against the bourgeoisie, but to fill the moral-intellectual void that was exploited by bourgeois-socialist "demagogues." This entailed elevating the workers' distinctive "way of life" into a moral framework that could guide their sociopolitical activity: "Organization is the passage from a mechanical order, blind, commanded from without, into organic, intelligent, and plainly accepted differentiation; in a word, it is a moral development."⁵³⁰ The spontaneous order of autonomous worker organizations would introduce "intelligence" into sociopolitical activity from below, performing a role from which the sceptical and relativistic intelligentsia had abdicated.

Since it was no longer a question of calling upon philosophers to adopt and validate "scientific socialism," the crisis of philosophy was transposed into an internal "Crisis of Socialism" – the title of an 1898 article by Sorel, published shortly after *Socialist Future*. Its opening sentence noted the "brutal character of contemporary socialism, which seems to take pride in abandoning all moral aspirations ... to exclusively pursue economic ends." Existing interpretations of Sorel would link this statement to his rejection of economic determinism and

⁵³⁰ Sorel, "L'avenir"; 110-11.

his accordant wish to reshape Marxism as a moral creed. We have now seen that the dichotomy of “moral” and “economic” held a deeper significance for Sorel, linked to the separation between the social values of the “plebeian” and “intellectual” classes. It is true that Sorel criticized the way in which the “theories of Marx” had been “transformed by vulgarizers” into a “so-called social science,” which dogmatically sustained certain economic claims contradicted by empirical data, and whose “fundamental thesis” was a “*catastrophic conception* of socialism ... attaching a great importance to a law of historical development from which the necessity of a great catastrophe is deduced.” However, he proceeded to state that this “scientific superstition” was *not* the root problem within contemporary socialism; it was merely a symptomatic consequence of “historical causes acting ... upon the spirit of the workers.”⁵³¹

In effect, Sorel’s critique of dogmatic “scientific socialism” was an extension of his remarks on Jacobin agitators in “Science and Socialism.” The fanatical vulgarizers of Marx exploited a certain vulnerability of the plebeian mass, but they did not create the fundamental problem. For Sorel, “socialist ideology” was above all “a reflection of the conditions within which the working class acquires the notion of the role that it can fulfill.” Within the contemporary socialist movement, this “notion” had primarily been acquired through the “legend of the [Paris] Commune,” which provided a model of violent struggle conducted by a “plebeian mass [*plèbe*] of workers, with [only] a rudiment of organization.”⁵³² It was the strength of this “legend” that underlay the “catastrophic conception of socialism,” because it had given the workers a conception of their role that depended upon external conditions rather than their own organization. As such, the ethical reformulation of Marxist ideology was not the key to resolving the “crisis of socialism,” but a secondary consequence of its resolution through

⁵³¹ Georges Sorel, “La crise du socialisme”; *Revue politique et parlementaire* 18 (October-December 1898), 597-601.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, 600-01.

the moralizing influence of syndical associations. The influence of received doctrines would be replaced by an autodidactic process of development: “whilst abstractions are manipulated with subtlety by the dialecticians of socialism, the workers, through their action [*en agissant*], create the true social science.”⁵³³

Worker autodidacticism was a key point of ideological affinity between Sorel and Pelloutier. Both framed worker self-education as a solution to the “social problem” that decadent bourgeois intellectuals were no longer equipped to resolve; it was therefore the necessary path for the workers’ movement to pursue, instead of appealing for legislative reforms within the framework of bourgeois democracy. The main themes of Pelloutier’s thought were inflected by this logic: on one hand, we have seen how he envisaged the proliferation of the general strike tactic through discussions amongst self-educated workers, rather than by means of socialist doctrine; on the other, he conceived the educational mission of the *Bourses du travail* as one of providing the workers with “the science of their suffering,” allowing them “to comprehend the causes of their servitude.”⁵³⁴

It is worth noting that this facet of Pelloutier’s thought was not simply a way of promoting the educational activities of the *Bourses du travail*, but a deep-rooted element of his sociopolitical standpoint. Pelloutier’s earliest contribution to the libertarian journal *L’Art social* was an obituary for the socialist theorist Benoît Malon in 1893, which emphasized Malon’s status as a self-taught thinker from a humble background; he “possessed to a supreme degree that tenacity in labour and modesty in erudition that is, in our declining society, the exclusive privilege of the working class.” The intellectual strength of working-class autodidacts could be attributed to their recognition that “the idea is the fruit of labours ... the result of the efforts of thousands of individuals,” and should therefore be treated as “collective property” rather than

⁵³³ Ibid., 611.

⁵³⁴ Pelloutier, “L’enseignement social; 497.

“personal property” – a view contrary to the values of “bourgeois individualism.” In other words, it was possible that the mental condition created by “manual labour” was especially conducive to intellectual endeavour in the context of modern capitalist society. As such, Pelloutier suggested that an “association of productive labour and intellectual labour [*du travail producteur et du travail de la pensée*]” might be the ultimate saviour of a decadent society – in effect, extending the autodidacticism of individual thinkers such as Malon to the working class as a whole. However, he also stated that, should such an association between manual and intellectual labour prove impossible, it would be necessary for intellectual activity to be completely subordinated to productive labour – in other words, for social life to be dedicated exclusively to manual production.⁵³⁵

This dual possibility marked a crucial ambivalence in Pelloutier’s writing and, consequently, French revolutionary syndicalist discourse. The central question was whether the growth of proletarian consciousness through syndicalism would relate in some way to the existing corpus of social-scientific knowledge, or if it would form itself on entirely original grounds based upon the unique social experience and productive expertise of the modern working class. Both possibilities were present within Pelloutier’s conception of syndical education. On one hand, his *History of the Bourses du travail* noted how the “libraries” of the *Bourses* were stocked with “social, economic, and philosophical critiques ... from Adam Smith to Marx,” aiming “to elevate the sentiments [and] broaden the understanding of the working class.”⁵³⁶ On the other, we recall how his pedagogical ideal of the *Musée du travail* was conceived as displaying nothing other than the “products” of social labour: “a museum organized in such a way that solely viewing products will familiarize visitors with economic

⁵³⁵ Fernand Pelloutier, “Benoît Malon”; *L’Art social* (September-October 1893), 279-80.

⁵³⁶ Pelloutier, *Histoire*, 189.

science.”⁵³⁷ We can thus distinguish between *autodidactic* and *productivist* aspects of Pelloutier’s syndicalist pedagogy.

The organicist logic of “direct action” can be placed squarely in the “productivist” category – it isolated and elaborated the aspect of Pelloutier’s syndicalism that implied a total submission of social knowledge to the new value-system of productive labour. As we have seen, the strict principles of Amiens doctrine held that the ideological and institutional edifice of “revolutionary syndicalism” derived spontaneously from the immediately-tangible interests and instinctive solidarity of the workers as producers, and thus emerged without the influence of “any preconceived idea.” In this framework, the autodidactic capacity of the workers to master the *established* forms of social or scientific knowledge was entirely immaterial. All that was required was the replicable example of the CGT’s “direct action” in order to liberate the innate revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat; the education of workers essentially entailed the inculcation and training of their *will to action*. This clarifies my argument that Sorelian discourse represented a “decomposition” of Amiens doctrine. In effect, Sorel’s writings elaborated the autodidactic element of Pelloutier’s syndicalism – that is, the speculative possibility that the modern proletariat was specially equipped to inherit and perfect the existing corpus of social-scientific knowledge and the established techniques of intellectual production. As such, Sorel’s conception of proletarian struggle diverged from the strict logic of “direct action.” However, this divergence was not simply due to the foreign influence of his Marxism, as is often assumed. Rather, it was built upon an autodidactic logic that already had a certain implicit presence in the discourse of French revolutionary syndicalism, but which the “formation” of Amiens doctrine had, in a sense, suppressed.

⁵³⁷ Pelloutier, “L’enseignement”; 501.

To illuminate how and why Sorel gave expression to the “autodidactic” aspect of Pelloutier’s syndicalism, I will firstly return to Pelloutier’s text on Malon. As already mentioned, this obituary was Pelloutier’s first contribution to the Parisian journals in which he would, in the subsequent years, elaborate his views on the “social question.” One of the main journals to which he would contribute was *La Revue socialiste*, a social-scientific monthly founded by Malon in 1885. Thus, in an odd sense, Pelloutier’s obituary for Malon can be considered as a kind of preface to his later writings on the “social question,” in that it outlined the rationale behind Pelloutier’s contributions to Malon’s scientific and socialist journal (“scientific socialism” in a general rather than strictly Marxist sense of the term). Here it is important to note that, although it celebrated Malon’s achievements as an autodidact, Pelloutier’s obituary also formulated a critique of his socialist standpoint. Malon envisaged a democratic-reformist path to socialist society, underlain by the “integral” progression of society; in other words, the “philosophical, political, and economic” advancement of humanity constituted a single, integrated process of “evolution,” which encompassed and reinforced the process of enlightened legislative reform.⁵³⁸ The intellectual labour of the *Revue socialiste* would clearly contribute to this process of development.

However, the futility of appealing to the bourgeoisie for rational social reforms was precisely what had prompted Pelloutier’s turn to the general strike in 1892, and stood at the root of his approach to the “social question.” The final paragraph of Pelloutier’s obituary invoked Malon’s recent theoretical work *Integral Socialism* (1890-1891), and described him as “the apostle of a beautiful and noble chimera,” whereby the “people” would achieve a “legitimate share of happiness” through “softness [*douceur*] and ... persuasion.”⁵³⁹ Clearly, Pelloutier’s contribution to Malon’s scientific-socialist journal could not share his aims of

⁵³⁸ K Steven Vincent, *Between Marxism and Anarchism: Benoît Malon and French reformist socialism* (University of California Press, 1992), 117-18.

⁵³⁹ Pelloutier, “Benoît Malon”; 280.

contributing to a process of enlightened social reform. Here the two possible paths of social transformation – autodidacticism or productivism – came into play. On one hand, if the transformation of society was to involve an “association” of manual labour and intellectual production, then Pelloutier’s syndicalism would entail a *radical extension* of Malon’s socialist project – redirecting its aims towards the autodidactic development of the proletariat rather than the demand for social reform. In this case, the practical example of Malon as a self-taught thinker would remain significant, even if his actual theories required adjustment. On the other hand, however, if Pelloutier’s syndicalist revolution was to be based solely upon the immanent value-system and technical expertise of productive labour, then it would entail a wholesale *abandonment* of Malon’s “scientific socialism” – that is, his rational-intellectual approach to social transformation – as a bourgeois illusion. In other words, Malon’s writings would be suitable stock for the libraries of the *Bourses du travail*, but they had no place in the *Musée du travail*.

This ambivalence can be linked to Malon’s own attitude towards the syndical movement. In *Integral Socialism*, Malon argued that strike action was “powerless” to transform the “economic organization” of society without the “conquest of public powers [*pouvoirs*],” whilst co-operative “societ[ies] of production” were inadequate to the “conditions of modern production.” However, they were equipped to perform a secondary role of “educat[ing] ... the proletariat and rendering it more apt for revendications of a political and social order”:

Although individual initiative on its own is powerless, the most powerful action of the public authorities [*pouvoirs*] cannot be truly beneficial unless it is seconded by the free, collective efforts of a proletariat familiarized with the administrative difficulties of political and economic organizations.

[As a] veritable school of industrial and commercial practice, co-operation ... is an excellent preparation for the social reforms that must be extracted from the public authorities.⁵⁴⁰

Of course, Pelloutier disagreed with the limits that Malon placed upon the revolutionary potential of the syndical movement and the “individual initiative” of its members; the revolutionary general strike was nothing other than a root-and-branch transformation of the “economic organization” of society, and would show the “conditions of modern production” to be in the hands of the proletariat itself. However, he shared Malon’s conception of the educational role of the *syndicats* – the point of difference was that Pelloutier invested syndicalist pedagogy with a self-sufficient revolutionary significance. The logic of “direct action” can be seen as a hardening of Pelloutier’s *disagreement* with Malon. From the perspective of Amiens doctrine, the insistence upon the “conquest of political powers” was a typical parliamentary-socialist formula used to divert the proletariat into political struggle rather than directly pursuing their immediate economic interests. It was necessary for revolutionary syndicalism to dispense entirely with socialist preconceptions of proletarian struggle – in other words, an abandonment of the premises of Malon’s scientific socialism.

Sorelian theory can be linked to the converse aspect of Pelloutier’s response to Malon, entailing an autodidactic radicalization rather than the total abandonment of his “scientific socialism.” The reason for this becomes clear when we examine the central argument of Malon’s *Integral Socialism*. For Malon, one of the main problems confronted by socialism was a “philosophical crisis, characterized by the absence of any convincing synthetic conception of the world or of any shared morality”:⁵⁴¹ “All religious dogmas are in decomposition, all

⁵⁴⁰ Benoît Malon, *Le socialisme intégral* [vol. 2, “Des réformes possibles et des moyens pratiques”] (Paris: Alcan, 1891), 65-67.

⁵⁴¹ Vincent, *Between Marxism and Anarchism*, 118.

philosophies in contradiction and struggle, all systems of morality under discussion. The result [is an] absence of directing principles.”⁵⁴² Consequently, Malon argued that “it does not suffice, within the contemporary conflict, to make appeals to economic interests ... to impassion the combatants and ennoble the struggle”; it was imperative for socialism to incorporate elements of “altruistic sentiment” and to make use of “moral forces.”⁵⁴³ For this, Malon called for an “enlarged and humanized science” to provide a “synthetic conception of the world” and an “ethic ... conforming to our moral and social development.”⁵⁴⁴ In short, Malon’s “science” responded to a notional “crisis” identical in nature to that which underlay Sorel’s early engagement with “scientific socialism.” (It is difficult to say whether Malon’s ideas directly influenced Sorel, or if they simply reflected a commonplace trope within the French socialist discourse of the period.) We have seen how this engagement ultimately led Sorel towards an autodidactic radicalization of social science:

[T]he workers, through their action, create the true social science [Socialist] theoreticians have much to learn from studying the syndical movement Already the notion of the essential unity of socialism has penetrated within the ranks of ideologues Between all of these [thinkers] there exists a general community of sentiments that separates them from bourgeois society ... ; we find among all of them ... the notion of *moral catastrophe*, resulting from the new evaluation of all moral values by the militant proletariat.⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴² Malon, *Socialisme intégral* [vol. 1] (Paris: Alcan, 1890), 27.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁵⁴⁵ Sorel, “La crise du socialisme”; 610.

Sorel's valorization of Pelloutier as the figure responsible for the "renaissance of the revolutionary idea" in France can be reinterpreted in this light. Here we can consider Sorel's preface (written in 1901) to Pelloutier's *History of the Bourses du travail*. Sorel firstly outlined Pelloutier's practical conception of "socialist education" – "to instruct [the proletariat] by action and to reveal to it its own capacity" – before noting with approval that Pelloutier "had no pretension whatsoever to become a theoretician of socialism; he believed that there were already too many dogmas." Sorel then discussed Pelloutier's commitment to the *Bourses du travail*:

Pelloutier considered the federated *Bourses* as the most perfect type that can be adopted for worker organization; some people will probably find this opinion a bit absolute; all the studies made in our times ... recognize that there are no universal rules in the social sciences The thesis of Pelloutier must be understood in a relative sense; moreover, no man of action ever speaks in an absolute manner; their judgements are always determined by certain practical preoccupations that they sometimes omit to enunciate, and which it is easy to discover with reference to their life.⁵⁴⁶

At first glance, these remarks would seem to fit with the notion that Pelloutier's vision of the *Bourses du travail* simply provided a practical vehicle for Sorel's voluntaristic reconception of proletarian development; by idealizing Pelloutier as a "man of action," his syndicalist principles could be distinguished from the theoretical dogmas of socialist orthodoxy. However,

⁵⁴⁶ Sorel, "Préface"; Pelloutier, *Histoire*, 27-28.

we have seen how the notion of “absolute” and “relative” social-scientific values held a deeper significance for Sorel, in relation to the sociopolitical crisis of relativism. It can thus be argued that Sorel framed Pelloutier’s writing as a new formal solution to this crisis.

By crystallizing his experience within the syndical movement into a set of practical values, Pelloutier was able to present a principle of “worker organization” that was simultaneously absolute and relative. Taken at face value, his support for the *Bourses du travail* was an “absolute” principle suitable for the moral comprehension of a plebeian audience, and thus able to “convince the workers” of the “significance of their true mission.” By encouraging worker autonomy in this specific manner, Pelloutier closed off the potential vulnerability of the masses to the deceptive values of socialist demagoguery. At the same time, his statements could be understood as “relative” judgements from the perspective of those “who occupy themselves with observing social phenomena,” since they were rooted in his “experience” of a particular sociopolitical milieu, and “Pelloutier never sought to dissimulate ... the influence that his personal conception of future development [*devenir*] exerted upon his judgements.”⁵⁴⁷ This double-sided quality of Pelloutier’s statements made them particularly suitable to guide the autodidactic development of the proletariat. His “absolute” practical judgements could provide an initial, organizational spur to the proletariat as a plebeian mass, but they would not ossify into dogmatic orthodoxies once the intellectual level of the proletariat rose to that of a socially-conscious class, since they would then take on a “relative” significance.

In this regard, Pelloutier’s writing provided a model for Sorel’s reinterpretation of Marxism. It was impossible for Marxism “to escape ... [the] necessity of relativism”; Marx’s writings had to be treated like “all books written by men of action,” as a set of principles “founded upon experience.” Marx’s “theory of class struggle” would thus operate in the same manner as Pelloutier’s vision of the *Bourses du travail*, but with broader horizons – it would

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., 27-29.

deal not only with the question of “worker organization,” but the entire “historic process by which the proletariat must emancipate itself.”⁵⁴⁸ Addressed to the plebeian mass, the Marxist idea of class struggle would present itself as an “absolute” moral code guiding the workers towards the path of autonomy from bourgeois politics. From an intellectual perspective, the same theory would constitute a “relative” standpoint subject to adjustment in accordance with its historical milieu. Here we find the embryonic form of Sorel’s key ideas in *Reflections*: on one hand, the “myth” of the proletarian general strike, a condensation of the Marxist idea of class struggle into a pure “means of acting upon the present,” “so well adapted to the soul of the workers that it is capable of dominating them in the most absolute manner, and leaving no place for desires that might satisfy the parliamentarians”;⁵⁴⁹ on the other, the standpoint of the “new school,” seeking to introduce “a sentiment of reality into socialist doctrines” by adjusting Marx’s theories to “the spontaneous movements that emerge within the working masses.”⁵⁵⁰

I will now summarize Sorel’s role in the trajectory of French revolutionary syndicalism. In the preface to Pelloutier’s *Histoire*, Sorel explicitly stated that Marx’s theory of class struggle rested upon a “preconceived revolutionary idea” with regard to the process of proletarian emancipation. This would clearly contravene the strict logic of syndicalist “direct action,” which insisted that both syndicalist doctrine and the institutional structure of the CGT emanated organically from instinctive worker solidarity against capitalist exploitation. However, following the example of Pelloutier, Sorel outlined a way of *articulating* this “preconceived idea” such that its effects were limited to a particular moment in the autodidactic development of proletarian practice. At an initial stage when the plebeian mass of workers was vulnerable to socialist demagoguery, a “preconceived idea” of proletarian development would serve to

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 29-31.

⁵⁴⁹ Georges Sorel, *Réflexions sur la violence* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), 118-22.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 40.

keep them on the right track; however, once the workers attained a degree of social consciousness through this practice, this idea would become relativized and would no longer exert any authority over their actions. This controlled departure from the *logic* of “direct action” was necessary for the articulation of “direct action” as a *doctrine*. Insofar as “direct action” itself operated as a “preconceived revolutionary idea,” it had to be couched as a “practical” spur to the masses: “Direct action appears ... as nothing other than the materialization of the principle of liberty, its realization within the masses: no longer in abstract, vague, and nebulous formulae, but in clear and practical notions, generative of combativity.”⁵⁵¹

Consequently, even though Sorel’s idiosyncratic, neo-Marxian arguments had a very limited impact upon the syndicalist militants, it crystallized an inherent tendency within French revolutionary syndicalism. Here we may consider the Sorelians’ self-conception as a “new school” of revolutionary socialism. At first glance, this might be viewed as little more than a self-aggrandizing representation, which gave an appearance of authority or significance to the small coterie associated with Sorel (which arguably only consisted of two other writers, Hubert Lagardelle and Edouard Berth). However, this conceit also implied a particular mode of sociopolitical *institutionality* – in other words, by labelling itself as the “new school,” Sorelian theory represented itself as a specific *social practice* (comparable to the institutional significance that the German Marxists attributed to “scientific socialism”). This institutionality can be linked to the CGT statute invoked at the beginning of the “Amiens Charter,” which declared that the task of the syndicalist movement was to group the workers “outside any political school.” Accordingly, the logic of “direct action” rejected any theoretical schooling of the workers, instead placing its faith in the “revolutionary gymnastics” of militant practice. However, Sorelian discourse offered an alternative basis for the proletarian struggle to operate “outside any political school” – not through an absolute rejection of theoretical schooling, but

⁵⁵¹ Émile Pouget, “L’action directe”; *L’action directe*, 154.

rather through the creation of a “new school” would not impose any preconceived “political” values or judgements upon the proletariat, because its exclusive task would be “to recognize the exact historical significance [*portée*] of the spontaneous movements that emerge from the working masses.”⁵⁵²

⁵⁵² Sorel, *Réflexions*, 40.

Conclusion

German orthodox Marxism and French revolutionary syndicalism were constitutively shaped by the mass-organizational growth of the European workers' movement in the late-nineteenth century. Consequently, both doctrines conceived the relationship between their ideological and institutional aspects in a distinctive manner – as a unprecedented moment of historical conjuncture, as an organic synthesis of theory and practice. Furthermore, I have argued that these conceptions did not simply impose elements of institutional pragmatism or mythology on to the “pure” ideologies of “proletarian revolution.” These ideologies already contained certain radical conceptual resources – the ambivalence of the proletariat as a “class” or “mass” phenomenon; and the dynamic relationship between theoretical “content” and literary “form” – upon which the mass-organizational logic of both tendencies could be founded. This interpretive framing sheds new light on the concepts of “scientific socialism” and “direct action.” Often viewed as a dogmatic affirmation of the objective validity of Marxist theory and the deterministic inevitability of capitalist collapse, my analysis has reconceived “scientific socialism” as a formula that primarily pertained to the philosophical-literary form of Marxist writing, which had to adapt to the altered political-historical conditions since the publication of the *Communist Manifesto*. It was thus a point of contact between the explicit Marxist logic of proletarian class development and the multi-faceted, evolving notion of German Social Democracy as a vehicle for popular enlightenment. Similarly, in contrast to the common interpretation of “direct action” as a pure rhetoric or mythology of “spontaneous” syndicalist practice, my analysis has reframed the term as an internalized logic of popular enlightenment – the proletariat could enlighten itself through the empirical “social facts” of its activity as a class. In this way, it elevated the pedagogical functions of the French syndical movement into a model of proletarian class struggle.

By sketching out the “formation” and “decomposition” of both doctrines in this light, I have presented a new interpretation of several major revolutionary thinkers. A general theme of this analysis was to identify the field of *revolutionary literature* as a key site in which doctrinal “convictions” regarding “proletarian revolution” took shape during the Second International period, because it was through written modes of popularization that the synthesis of class ideology and mass institutionality could be formulated. We have thus seen how the “formation” of both doctrines was tied to visions of *journalistic popularization* – in particular, the democratization of social science through Kautsky’s *Neue Zeit* and the empirical elucidation of popular action by Pouget’s *Voix du peuple* – which served to define Marxist “scientific socialism” and syndicalist “direct action” as textual strategies for integrating organic proletarian development into the politics of mass enlightenment. The “decomposition” of both doctrines involved attempts to extend the parameters of this synthesis in response to perceived “crises” of revolutionary ideology. This led to the identification of prerequisite requirements for “proletarian revolution” that could not be adequately addressed through the established strategies of empirical representation to which Erfurt and Amiens doctrine were tied – crystallized in Luxemburg’s conception of the “mass strike” as a spur for extending proletarian class consciousness to a mass scale, and Sorel’s conception of the Marxist “myth” as a way of elevating the organicist mass co-ordination of the syndical movement into a new proletarian morality. These visions both entailed a convergence between orthodox Marxism and revolutionary syndicalism, not in terms of the explicit ideas of “scientific socialism” and “direct action,” but at the level of the implicit grounding of these concepts as textual strategies for merging the “class” and “mass” elements of proletarian revolution.

These findings can be formulated in terms of a new approach to interpreting the revolutionary doctrine of the Second International era as a whole. The existing historiography has tended to approach this field by focusing on the nature and development of individual

thinkers, due to the apparent importance of certain absolute convictions in shaping and orienting the revolutionary standpoints of the period. To participate in the workers' movement during this time was to be a "revolutionary" or a "reformist," a "determinist" or a "voluntarist," a "socialist" or "syndicalist." Leszek Kołakowski had linked these divergences to a fundamental dilemma that were left unresolved by classical theories of "proletarian revolution": "whether, and in what sense, socialism is a continuation of human history and in what sense it represents a breach with all that has gone before; or, to put it another way, how far and in what sense the proletariat is part of bourgeois society." The response to this dilemma would seem to be determined by more or less arbitrary beliefs concerning the future of socialism, leading to a broad split between the "revolutionaries who refused to have any dealings with existing society or to attempt to reform it, but who counted on a great historical apocalypse that would sweep away oppression," and the reformists who conceived "socialism as the gradual increase of justice, equality, freedom, and community of ownership within the present system."⁵⁵³

My analysis suggests that a different interpretive approach can be taken to this doctrinal field, which effectively operates in the opposite direction. The mass-organizational growth of the workers' movement presented a dilemma to theorists of "proletarian revolution," in that the immediately-available forms of practical revolutionary activity were embedded within the established sociopolitical structure. The fundamental problematic confronted by proletarian-revolutionary doctrine was thus to absorb the practical values of reformism into a theoretical framework that implied an absolute break from bourgeois society. For this, they could call upon the ambivalent semantic resources of "proletarian revolution" as a historical concept, which could denote both the radical destruction of Enlightenment to free the proletarian "class" from the bourgeoisie's social oppression, and the radical continuation of social Enlightenment to

⁵⁵³ Kołakowski, *Main Currents* [vol. 2], 29.

penetrate the consciousness of the proletarian “mass” and empower it to take over the mantle of sociopolitical progress.

German orthodox Marxism and French revolutionary syndicalism can be viewed as structured applications of this ambivalence to establish the synthesis of revolutionary ideology and modern democratic institutionality necessitated by the political-historical circumstances of the Second International period. The conceptual mechanisms of “scientific socialism” and “direct action” were then required to re-establish an organic unity between the “class” ideology and “mass” institutionality of proletarian revolution – mechanisms whose ultimate grounds resided, as we have seen, in formal literary strategies. From this perspective, to comprehend the revolutionary doctrines of the Second International period, the writing of “proletarian revolution” must be framed as a genre of modernist literature, in which the integral meaning of the revolution as proletarian class action was conveyed to a mass readership through radically autoreferential textual forms that themselves instantiated forms of proletarian mass action.

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