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**GERMAN  
SOCIAL  
DEMOCRACY**



**A New Edition  
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BERTRAND RUSSELL

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SOCIAL DEMOCRACY



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GERMAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

BY BERTRAND RUSSELL

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## PREFACE TO THE 1965 EDITION

This book was written nearly seventy years ago and in those seventy years much has happened and much has changed. At the time when I wrote the book, the Kaiser was in his glory. He and his Government were bitterly hostile to the Social Democrats, and the Social Democrats returned the hostility with interest. They were, at that time, completely orthodox Marxists and they hoped for a revolution in Germany which should turn the country into a socialist republic. The point of view from which I wrote the book was that of an orthodox Liberal. It was not until 1914 that I became a member of the Labour Party. I have made no attempt to modify the book in a way compatible with my present opinions. I have left it as an historical document in which a former writer comments on a former world.

BERTRAND RUSSELL

## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

THE following six Lectures were delivered at the London School of Economics and Political Science in February and March 1896. They are not intended to supply a full history of Social Democracy in Germany, but rather to bring into relief those aspects of such a history which seemed to the author to have been the most important in producing the present political situation. The principle of selection, accordingly, has been throughout to emphasise the events and the speculations which have led to the actual state of feeling. Thus in treating of Marx, I have confined myself to those parts of his work which have chiefly influenced Socialistic opinion in Germany, and have treated very slightly the second and third volumes of *Das Kapital*, which have not yet, so far as I was able to discover, had any considerable influence in modifying the effects of the first volume.

Again, in the Lecture on Lassalle, I have laid far more stress on his debts to Marx than on those to Rodbertus; not because the latter were less

important in Lassalle himself, but because, so far as his political effect is concerned, the views he owed to Rodbertus had little result; while those which came from Marx, on the contrary, bore good fruit, both directly and indirectly, in the subsequent growth of Social Democracy.

My acknowledgments are due to my wife for constant help, both by criticism and by collection of material; also to all the German Socialists, whether leaders or followers, with whom I have come in contact, for their uniform courtesy, and for their kind assistance in supplying information.

A bibliography of the principal works consulted is appended.



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## GERMAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

### LECTURE I

#### MARX AND THE THEORETICAL BASIS OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

“WE German Socialists,” says Engels, “are proud of our descent, not only from Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Owen, but also from Kant, Fichte, and Hegel. The German labour-movement is the heir of German classical philosophy.”

This haughty claim expresses the peculiar feature which gives to Social Democracy an interest and a human value beyond that of any ordinary political movement. For Social Democracy is not a mere political party, nor even a mere economic theory; it is a complete self-contained philosophy of the world and of human development; it is, in a word, a religion and an ethic. To judge the work of Marx, or the aims and beliefs of his followers, from a narrow economic standpoint, is to overlook the whole body and spirit of their greatness. I shall endeavour, since this aspect of the movement is easily lost sight of in the details of history, to bring it into prominence by a brief preliminary account

of Marx's philosophy, showing the sources from which it sprang, and the motives which led him to give it an economic form.

Marx was born in 1818, and grew up at the time when the influence of Hegel's philosophy in Germany was at its height. In every university it was taught and believed; its jargon was familiar to all, and its spirit, in one form or another, animated every intelligent student. But Hegel's spirit was sufficiently broad to contain, among its disciples, the most various and even contradictory tendencies. He was great, on the one hand by his metaphysical results, on the other by his logical method; on the one hand as the crown of dogmatic philosophy, on the other as the founder of the dialectic, with its then revolutionary doctrine of historical development. Both these aspects of Hegel's work revolutionised thought, but in their practical bearing they diverged widely. While the practical tendency of his *metaphysic* was, and is, to glorify existing institutions, to see in Church and State the objective embodiment of the Absolute Idea, his *dialectic method* tended to exhibit no proposition as unqualified truth, no state of things as final perfection. It is not necessary to explain, in a lecture on Marx, the logical function of the dialectic; but the historical application, which reappears in his book "Capital," must be briefly indicated. Since, to Hegel, the reality of the world is only thought, the logical development of thought, from the simplest to the most complex forms, must reproduce itself in the historical development of things. The validity of this view we need not here examine; it is sufficient to point out that

Hegel, in his "Philosophy of History," endeavoured to exhibit the actual course of the world as following the same necessary chain of development which, as it exists in thought, forms the subject of his logic. In this development, everything implies, and even tends to become, its opposite, as son implies father; the development of the world therefore proceeds by action and reaction, or, in technical language, by thesis and antithesis, and these become reconciled in a higher unity, the synthesis of both. Of this process we have an example in Marx's doctrine of the development of production: First, he says, in the savage and the patriarchal eras, we have production for self; a man's goods and the produce of a man's labour are intended solely for his own consumption. Then, in the capitalistic era, the age of exchange and commerce, people produce exclusively for others; things become commodities, having exchange-value, and destined to be used by others than the producers. This is, in technical language, the negation or antithesis of production for self; the two find their synthesis in the communistic state, in production by society for itself. Here the individual still produces for others, but the community produces explicitly—as in the capitalistic era it produces implicitly—for itself. The communistic state ought, according to the development-conception of the dialectic method, to form the starting-point of a new triad, the thesis for a new antithesis; but if this idea ever occurred to Marx, he must have thought that "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," for he nowhere gives a hint of anything better than the socialistic community.

This, then, Marx accepted from Hegel: that the development of the world runs parallel with the development of thought, and that both proceed by the dialectic method. But here ends his debt to Hegel. It is often supposed, especially by opponents of Socialism, that his debt was much larger; that he accepted the glorification of the State to which Hegel's philosophy was supposed to lead; but this, though partially true of Lassalle, is, as applied to Marx, a "ridiculous fallacy," as Mr. Bosanquet says,<sup>1</sup> and one which it is important to avoid. Through the influence of Feuerbach, and by contact with the French philosophers of his day, Marx early became a thorough-going materialist, and thus abandoned entirely what he calls "the mystifying side of the Hegelian dialectic." To Marx, the movement of history runs parallel to that of thought, not because, as with Hegel, the world is thought, but because thought is the mere outcome and product of material things, which govern all its motions. "My dialectic," says Marx, "is not only different from Hegel's, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life process of the human brain is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of 'the Idea.' With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind,

<sup>1</sup> Editor's Preface to Dr. Schäffle's "Impossibility of Social Democracy," London, 1892, p. vii. How much more Marx was influenced by Hegel's method than by his results, is well illustrated in the sentence: "or, la métaphysique, la philosophie toute entière se résume, d'après Hegel, dans la méthode."—*Misère de la Philosophie*, 1847, p. 93.



and translated into forms of thought. . . . In its mystified form, dialectic became the fashion in Germany, because it seemed to transfigure and to glorify the existing state of things. In its rational form it is a scandal and an abomination to bourgeoisdom and its doctrinaire professors, because it includes in its comprehension and affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, at the same time also, the recognition of the negation of that state, of its inevitable breaking up; because it regards every historically-developed social form as in fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary existence; because it lets nothing impose upon it, and is in its essence critical and revolutionary.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus Marx is at once logically a dialectical rationalist and metaphysically a dogmatic materialist. These two qualities together account for the main characteristics of that “materialistic theory of history” which forms the basis of Social Democratic politics. From his interpretation of the dialectic, two remarkable features of that theory flow: the revolutionary character, and the inevitableness, almost fatality, of all development. The revolutionary character arises from the logical, as opposed to biological or psychological, nature of the dialectic process: between one conception and its opposite, as between father and son, no gradual transition, no imperceptible organic growth, is possible: logical ideas are clear-cut, sharply defined one against another, and incapable of a Darwinian evolution. Hence the philosophy of history which sees, in successive states of society,

<sup>1</sup> Preface to second edition of “Capital.”