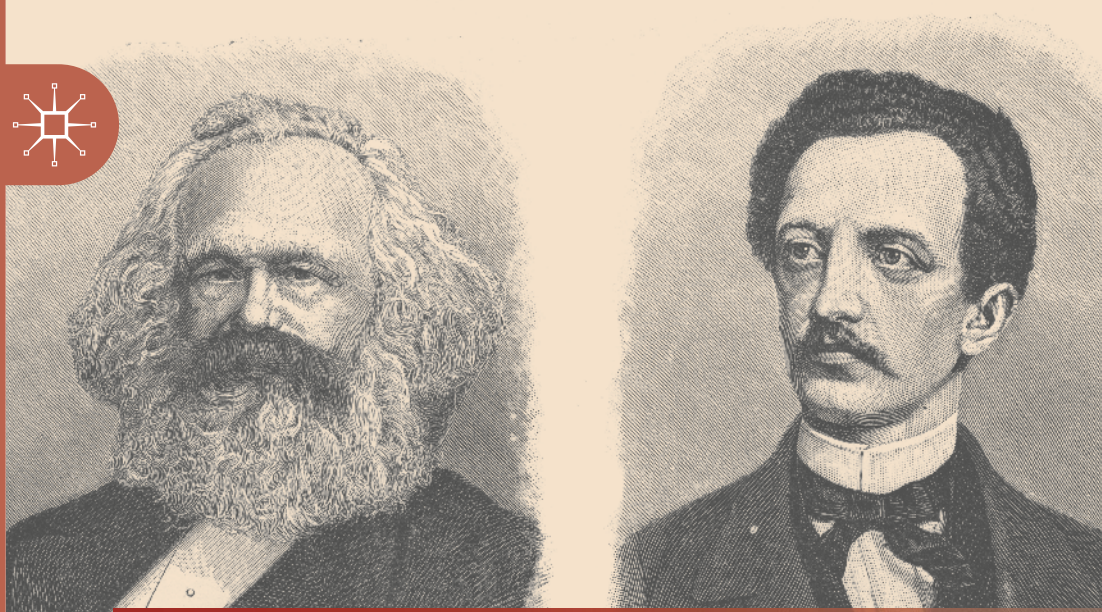

Eduard Bernstein on Socialism Past and Present

Essays and Lectures on Ideology

Marius S. Ostrowski

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Contents

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Marius S. Ostrowski

By the turn of the twentieth century, the socialist movement and its governing ideology were being forced to confront an increasingly drastic challenge to their social claims and ambitions. Yet *prima facie*, the course of the movement's development in the latter half of the nineteenth century offered ample grounds for hope and optimism about its future prospects. The story of socialism in this period is one of at times seemingly miraculous survival—endurance, recovery, and even flourishing in the face of a relentless barrage of obstacles and setbacks. By any measure, the period began in the most inauspicious possible way. The crushing defeat of the 1848–1849 revolutions in Western and Central Europe—in which socialists, communists, and other radicals found themselves and their demands marginalised by republicans, liberals, and nationalists of a bourgeois stripe—was swiftly followed by the counter-revolutionary reaction of the 1850s, in which socialists bore the brunt of heightened police repression, curtailment of rights, and strict censorship. Yet by the 1860s, the socialist movement had steadily increased in size and organisation, first at a regional, then at a national level. The rise of an urban industrial working class created new demands for better work and living conditions that the existing system of guilds and fraternal societies was ill-equipped to manage, leading to the proliferation of labour councils, forerunners of modern trade unions, first in Britain and then across the Continent. Increasingly durable socialist papers and societies sprang up to act as forums for progressive debate. With the gradual spread of electoral democracy across

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Europe, workers' parties formed in opposition not only to aristocratic and clerical conservatism, but also to perceived insufficiencies in the reformist efforts of liberals and radicals.[1]

By the 1860s, out of a disparate collection of largely isolated agitators and sect-like clubs, a broad coalition of groups had arisen encompassing varying currents of ideas and interests—from labour activists to democratic franchise reformers, from utopian experimenters to advocates of cooperative mutualism. Initially, all of them were united under a shared socialist banner, as the pragmatic need to cooperate to survive outweighed finer points of ideological difference. But this was never a stable or lasting situation, and disputes over socialism's assumptions and aims soon led to rifts within the coalition—perhaps most dramatically, the split between mutualists and statists that caused the demise of the first effort at socialist internationalism, the International Workingmen's Association (1864–1876). The rest of the century was marked by socialism's steady consolidation into a more clearly-defined construct. The initial diversity of socialist currents was reduced to something akin to an ideological oligopoly, dominated by Marxism, the current of thought developed by the German socialists Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, alongside a number of smaller strands. The movement also refined its view of society and programme of demands, re-establishing its international presence in the form of the Second International (1889–1914), whose early congresses adopted resolutions on improving labour conditions, women's rights, agrarian policy, strike action, and opposition to militarism.

This process went hand-in-hand with its ascent to ever greater societal prominence on several fronts. Despite the best efforts of several decades of repression—including long-standing bans on trade union and partisan organisation—European governments were increasingly forced to concede the legitimacy of socialist activism. National trade union centres emerged in Britain in 1868, Germany in 1892, France in 1895, and Scandinavia in 1898–1899. Aided by incremental franchise extensions, socialist parties began to win parliamentary representation: for the first time in Germany in 1871, France in 1881, the Netherlands in 1888, Belgium in 1890, Italy in 1895, and Britain in 1900. By the start of the twentieth century, they were attracting nearly 5 million votes in total across Europe, and as much as 20–30% of the vote in countries such as Austria, Belgium, and above all Germany.

Socialism at the turn of the century, then, was by any standard an ideology on the rise. It is difficult to overstate the extent to which its ideological insurgency fundamentally and irrevocably reshaped the contours of

society. Simply put, the legacy of socialism was to inaugurate a new chapter in the treatment of 'the social'—in theoretical understandings of the constitution and driving forces of society, and in the practical manifestation of society's interests and needs. From a *disciplinary* viewpoint, it radically reoriented the perspective of political economy, and integrated it with insights from the philosophy of history to provide a new analysis of society and of production as the dynamo that underpins societal development. In its emphasis on the scientific method and reliance on empirical-inductive reasoning, experiential proof, and evidence from statistics, history, and ethnology, it instigated a significant leap forward in the *methodology* of social thought. It turned against both organicist and individualist-contractarian accounts of the *constitution of society*, instead offering a theory of society as composed of usually binary groups of economic classes whose diverging, even essentially opposing interests led them to engage in periodic conflicts of greater or lesser intensity against one another. Socialism also centred new interpretations of *concepts* such as 'social' and 'sociality', connecting them with specific definitions of solidarity, community, cooperation, and democracy, and introducing new derivations, such as 'socialisation', to describe the alternative economic system its adherents aspired to. It proposed radical uses for existing *structures*, above all those of the state and legal system, aiming to reorient the content of rights to include positive provision of social goods and improve the accessibility of representative parliamentary institutions, and agitated for the introduction of entirely new ones, including cooperative enterprises and state-administered public services. Lastly, it devised *strategies* to organise and mobilise the mass population on a scale never seen before, with a core of the industrial working class bolstered by appeals to allies in other population groups. In turn, the combination of these theoretical and practical advances also won socialism tangible results, with items on the socialist agenda steadily starting to become a reality: gradual extensions of the franchise, the introduction of early forms of social security and welfarist legislation, and improvements in pay and working conditions.

Unsurprisingly, these developments were not slow in eliciting a response from anti-socialist forces among societal elites. But in the final decades of the nineteenth century, this response shifted decidedly away from the flat rejection and truculent resistance that had characterised the mid-century reaction. It had become clear that mere repression and censorship—such as the German Anti-Socialist Laws (1878–1890)—had failed to extirpate the socialist movement. Instead, a variety of attempts began to emerge

that pushed back against socialism in a different way: by offering persuasive alternatives that sought to mimic, undermine, and displace socialism's theoretical and practical content on all fronts. The rise of the new discipline of sociology, which offered a variety of alternative, often less historicist and less economistic models of society and approaches to studying it, was spearheaded above all by academics with anti-socialist or at least anti-Marxist inclinations—including liberals such as Lujo Brentano and Max Weber, and conservatives such as Hans Delbrück, Werner Sombart, and Adolph Wagner. Methodologically, anti-socialists invested considerable energies in intense sponsorship of social Darwinism—especially as articulated by Herbert Spencer and his followers—as a rival way of bringing scientific insight into social thought, and above all as a competing account of social development. This was matched by attempts to reconceive society in terms of 'elites' and 'masses/crowds', denuding both terms of their economic class associations and even their conflictual relationship, or diverting the meaning of social conflict along national, racial, or religious lines. Anti-socialist ideologies sought to claim their own versions of the 'social' label, ranging from the Catholic social thought that underpinned the rise of Christian democracy, to the emergence of a 'social' faction within liberalism that contested the hegemony of the *laissez-faire* 'Manchester School', and even aristocratic-conservative attempts at enlightened patrician *noblesse oblige*. Governments concerned at the electoral rise of socialism brought in measures to give the hitherto 'night-watchman' *Polizei* state social functions, introducing rudimentary social insurance systems, in an attempt to stave off socialism's revolutionary edge. Simultaneously, non-socialist parties developed strategies to make deliberate inroads on socialism's heartland voters among the working class, ranging from 'One-Nation' Tory democracy to the emergence of the *Volkspartei*, and the politico-denominational *verzuilt* (pillarised) community system in Belgium and the Netherlands.

Together, these theoretical and practical responses constituted nothing less than a comprehensive existential threat to socialism's ideological *raison d'être*. In ideological terms, they represented a grand essential contestation of the contents of the 'social' or 'socialist' labels, and of which societal groups owned the right to use them to define their ideological assumptions and goals.[2] In other words, the questions of 'what is social' and 'what is socialism' had moved from being merely an internal dispute between different factions in the socialist movement—Blanquists, Fourierists, Lassalleans, Marxists, Owenites, Proudhonians, and other

nineteenth-century groupings—to a debate now being waged across all parts of society. This moved socialism from being on the offensive, from asserting its demands against external resistance, to being on the defensive, to protecting its demands against external encroachment. Specifically, the range of new ideological threats that socialism was facing from all sides explicitly and deliberately jeopardised its claim to be the best (indeed, the only) movement capable of grasping and speaking for society as a whole and for the mass of society's members. Pre-eminence as *the* expression of societal progress in movement form—a mantle it insisted it had wrested from out of the clutches of the bourgeois radicals of 1848–1849—was, and indeed remains, core to socialism's identity as an ideology. The attempts by other ideologies to appropriate and outdo its theoretical and practical achievements hence struck at the heart not only of socialism's authenticity, but its entire existence.

Arguably, socialism at the turn of the century was in danger of becoming a victim of its own success. Over decades of committed struggle, its thinkers and activists had sidelined, coaxed, or browbeaten their rivals—adjacent allies and implacable enemies alike—into acknowledging the importance of a 'social' perspective on society. One after the other, historians and philosophers, liberals and conservatives, aristocrats, clerics, and the commercial-industrial classes were updating their worldviews to include a 'social' component—sometimes autonomously developed as a counterpoint to the socialists' offering, sometimes brutally appropriated from it. It was a remarkable ideological feat. But now that socialists had achieved it, they had to be prepared to face the consequences. They had to find a way for socialism to stay at the leading edge of the theoretical and practical 'social' revolution it was unleashing—and not be overtaken by it.

Among the figures within the socialist movement who grasped these threats as well as the need to meet them most acutely, one of the most significant was Eduard Bernstein (1850–1932), now generally remembered as the intellectual progenitor of Social Democracy. From the time of his first forays into socialism as a member of the 'Eisenacher' Social-Democratic Workers' Party of Germany (SDAP) in 1872, Bernstein took an active part in every facet of socialist theoretical and practical activity. As a thinker, he began as a close confidant and ally of Engels in his interpretation of Marxian socialism, but caused hitherto unprecedented controversy within the movement in the late 1890s by espousing a new socialist position that appeared to abandon the Marxian commitment to revolutionary overthrow of capitalist society in favour of its gradual reform. His

arguments, articulated in a series of articles on the 'Problems of Socialism' (1896–1898) and the book *The Preconditions of Socialism* (1899), lit a fuse in German Social Democracy and the wider socialist movement, and were vehemently challenged at conferences of the Social-Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) in 1899, 1901, and 1903, as well as a congress of the Second International in 1900.[3] As a journalist and publisher, Bernstein served as editor of *Der Sozialdemokrat* (1881–1890), the SPD's main party organ during the Anti-Socialist Laws, and the more historically-oriented *Dokumente des Sozialismus* (1902–1905), and on the editorial team of the SPD's main theoretical journal *Die Neue Zeit* (1891–1900). He also edited volumes of correspondence between Marx and Engels (1913) and selected documents from their *Nachlass* (1908, 1914), as well as a 12-volume edition of the collected works of their longstanding colleague and rival Ferdinand Lassalle (1919–1920). As an activist, Bernstein was a prodigious and talented stump-speaker on behalf of first the SDAP and later the SPD, before falling foul of the Anti-Socialist Laws in 1878. Exiled to Switzerland, he worked as personal secretary to a major SPD donor, Karl Höchberg; then, forced to leave under pressure from the German government, he settled in Britain in 1887, where he integrated himself rapidly into the disputes between the reform strategies advocated by the originally left-humanist Fabian Society of Beatrice and Sidney Webb and the more Marxist-oriented Social Democratic Federation of Henry Hyndman. Later, after being allowed to return from exile in 1901, Bernstein was elected to the Reichstag for the SPD, first in Breslau (1901–1907, 1912–1918) and later in Potsdam (1920–1928), and served briefly (1918–1919) as Assistant Secretary to the Reich Treasury in the early months of the Weimar Republic.[4]

These many engagements placed Bernstein at the heart of ideological contestations over socialism and 'the social'. This collection centres Bernstein's engagement with these key theoretical and practical challenges within and beyond the socialist movement, covering forty years of literary activity—beginning in 1891 at the height of his personal association with Engels and professional collaboration with Karl Kautsky as joint guardians of the Marxian legacy, and ending in 1931, shortly before his death. It brings together a selection of writings—books, lectures, articles, and other documents—that locate Bernstein squarely at the epicentre of this period of socialist *ideologisation*, and at the frontlines of the essential contestation taking place over the 'social' label. Beyond the specific debates over 'reform versus revolution' and 'revisionism versus orthodoxy' with which

Bernstein is traditionally most commonly associated, the texts in this collection find him confronting, again and again, the existential question of his movement: 'what is socialism?' It traces the multiple levels at which he asks and seeks to answer this question—from metatheory to intellectual history to outward-facing partisan defence—and in doing so uncovers a rich seam of intellectual activity that has receded somewhat into the background relative to better-known debates.

The writings presented here also illuminate how Bernstein saw his own work as a socialist ideologist, specifically in response to the range of ideological threats the movement faced. He saw himself—or to a greater or lesser extent readily accepted his labelling by others—as a social scientist (as much as he disliked the term), a social democrat, a Marxist, and a materialist.[5] Different contexts and cases brought these multiple ideological identities to the fore at different times and with different levels of emphasis. But just as, with the writings presented in previous volumes, it is inopportune and self-defeating to attempt to separate out from one another Bernstein's activities as (e.g.) a historian, philosopher, jurist, or political economist, it is similarly futile to try to create areas of clear blue (or indeed red) water between all of these multiple 'social-oriented' identities.[6] For Bernstein, they were each branches that led back to the same ideological root: that of socialism. In his view, being a socialist meant being all of them, at least to a highly significant extent. The purpose of the following discussion is to situate Bernstein's activity as a socialist ideologist within the wider contours of the debates taking place in the socialist movement at the time, outline the primary elements of his account of socialism, and offer some closing reflections on what can be learned from his analysis today.

Problems of Socialism, Continued: Socialism After the Revisionist Controversy

The revisionist controversy that gripped Marxist theory and social-democratic practice in 1896–1903 heralded a period of ever greater fragmentation within the socialist movement. It marked the height of socialism's own unique brand of *fin-de-siècle* pessimism, after capitalism had demonstrated a resilience that socialists did not think possible in its recovery from the 1873–1896 Long Depression, and thereby pushed hopes for the imminent achievement of socialism back into a suddenly uncertain future. With orthodox Marxists' failure to completely quash the

revisionist current, vital faultlines were embedded within the internal coalition (of parties, unions, intellectuals, etc.) that comprised the socialist movement—which became only deeper and more permanent over the course of the next several decades. Starting in the early years of the twentieth century, the "revisionism/orthodoxy" and "reform/revolution" debates were overtaken by—or, more accurately, folded into—a series of new questions that preoccupied socialists across Europe and the wider world. These manifested in a successive parade of acrimonious debates, and in some cases earth-shattering crises, that all turned on the promise and priorities of socialism.

In the wake of a series of elections (1902 in Belgium and France, 1904 in Italy, 1905 in the Netherlands, and 1907 in Germany), in which socialist and workers' parties stagnated or even lost both vote share and parliamentary seats to liberal and conservative parties riding a new tide of patriotic and militaristic fervour among the population, revisionist elements within the movement demanded changes to the long-standing socialist opposition to nationalism on the one hand, and imperialism and colonialism on the other. As tensions grew between the major European powers in the form of arms races, territorial disputes, and chauvinist policies, the socialist movement found itself confronted with the prospect of a European war that would jeopardise the burgeoning international solidarity it had fostered over previous decades. This prompted extended debates about using a coordinated mass strike to cripple the ability of national governments to wage war, but without a decisive resolution at either national or international levels of the movement. When war came in 1914, the decision of first the SPD and then other socialist parties to support war credits for their governments, and in many cases endorse war conduct that flagrantly defied the norms socialists had formerly claimed to espouse, led to the first comprehensive split in the movement. The Second International collapsed, and some parties suffered internal schisms, most prominently between the now-majority revisionist SPD and the largely orthodox Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany (USPD) in 1917. With the end of the war in 1918, socialist parties swept to power across Europe for the first time, in many cases as a result of the 1917–1923 wave of revolutions. This fuelled new debates about the form of government socialists should support, with revisionists largely aligning behind a continuation of parliamentary democracy, and orthodox elements advocating moving towards a council republic.

In short, over the three decades that followed the revisionism debate, the socialist movement in effect came to the view that there were rather

more 'problems of socialism' than the ones Bernstein had first identified in his eponymous articles of 1896–1898. Bernstein himself started this period as a borderline pariah in the socialist movement. He narrowly escaped attempts by enraged orthodox Marxists to have him summarily expelled from the SPD, and in the first years after the revisionist controversy found only a few prominent sympathisers for his position—including Eduard David and Wolfgang Heine, both of whom later rose to prominent positions in the Weimar Republic. Bernstein and his work were subjected to endless volleys of polemical attacks by fellow socialists, most notably the famous *Social Reform and Revolution* (1900) by Rosa Luxemburg, which established her as a leading spokesperson of Marxist orthodoxy, and—more painfully—*Bernstein and the Social-Democratic Programme* (1899) by his erstwhile friend and colleague Kautsky.[7] After a series of increasingly embittered exchanges, Bernstein abruptly terminated his association with *Neue Zeit* in 1900, and switched to writing for the newer and more iconoclastic social-democratic periodical *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, edited by Joseph Bloch, who rapidly converted the journal into a permanent (and increasingly popular) bastion of revisionist thought.[8]

From this new position, as the revisionist controversy was superseded by the 'national/colonial question' and the 'mass strike question', Bernstein became gradually ever more involved in all of these debates, producing a plethora of articles for the *Monatshefte*, and three books: *The Political Mass Strike and the Political Situation of Social Democracy in Germany* (1905), *The Strike: Its Nature and its Effects* (1906), and *The English Danger and the German People* (1911).[9] He also dedicated himself to less ideologically controversial historical work on the rise of the German workers' movement (1907–1910) and democratic socialist currents during the English Civil War (1908), but produced little additional content explicitly in defence of his revisionist position.[10] WW1 and the 1918–1919 German Revolution, which brought to an end the Wilhelmine *Kaiserreich* and inaugurated the Weimar Republic, had a major impact on Bernstein's stance in the socialist movement. He was one of very few prominent revisionists to turn against the war, and ended up a member of the USPD, allied with Kautsky, Luxemburg, and many of his most vehement former critics against David, Heine, and several of his strongest prior supporters. As a commentator during WW1, he consistently advocated a negotiated end to hostilities and a resurrection of international socialist solidarity.[11] At its conclusion, he became an impassioned voice in favour of SPD–USPD reunification and an end to socialist fragmentation, and in the final decade

of his life he took on the role of a kind of grandee of Social Democracy, and a dedicated propagandist on behalf of the Republic and socialism's role in its government.[12]

Cutting across the many twists and turns in the contextual backdrop to his work, what unites all of these interventions is that, in them, Bernstein was deploying a socialist ideological perspective to analyse specific external theoretical and practical questions in a way that aligned him more or less with the major socialist interlocutors of his time. But alongside this, Bernstein was also simultaneously engaging in a debate on the object of this socialist ideological perspective itself. In *Preconditions* and the 'Problems of Socialism' articles, some of which he republished as part of the gargantuan *On the History and Theory of Socialism* (1901), which effectively acted a theoretical supporting apparatus and companion volume to *Preconditions*, Bernstein probed what he saw as key problems in Marxist theory that had been revealed by a combination of new developments in societal conditions, social theory, and social-democratic practice. From this point onwards, he launched into a new phase of his analysis, and challenged socialist ideology on two new dimensions, one excavating deeper into its Marxist theoretical foundations, the other pushing further into its applications in social-democratic practice.

Bernstein did so essentially in two waves, with vastly different receptions. When he first addressed these themes in 1901–1906 (with some preludes in 1891–1897 and postludes in 1908–1912) much of his analysis was swept up into the whirlwind of outrage about revisionism more generally. His every intervention was met with howls of fury from the orthodox side, and Bernstein was reluctantly forced to clarify and defend his position in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, as well as occasional terse notes to *Neue Zeit*.[13] By the time he revisited these themes in 1918–1922 especially, Bernstein was writing at the height of his ideological achievement. Denuded of many of its orthodox elements, which remained in the USPD or even defected further left to the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), the SPD reoriented towards a more revisionist track, and called Bernstein to lead the drafting of its 1921 Görlitz party programme. It was his understanding of socialism that became, at least for a time, the ideological basis for German Social Democracy, and (re)statements of his views—now regarded as seminal interventions—were in demand in Germany and beyond. Unsurprisingly, it was above all in the second wave that Bernstein had the intellectual latitude to offer not just a diagnosis and critique of the societal position of socialist ideology, but also—in line with his own clear

preference for maintaining a healthy balance between these elements in his work—a more positive statement to show socialists an ideological way forward. Although he was, in effect, extending yet further the list of 'problems of socialism', he was doing so very clearly from the perspective of reinforcing and improving socialists' ability to hold their own in theoretical and practical ideological contests.

What are the two dimensions to Bernstein's new challenge to socialism? At the core of Bernstein's engagement with socialism lies an enduring concern with the proper relationship between scientific social research and socialist strategy. In Marxist discourse at the time, this relationship was fused into an integral connection in the idea of 'scientific socialism'—in vulgarised form, that scientific enquiry, if rigorously undertaken, leads to socialist conclusions, with particular focus on the two Marxian insights of the materialist conception of history and the creation of surplus value under capitalism.[14] Bernstein queried both directions of this relationship—that science '*is*' socialist, and that socialism '*is*' a science—and set himself the task of delineating the boundaries between the two, or to put it differently, between social(ist) *theory* and social(ist) *practice*. Going well beyond his remarks on the topic in *Preconditions*, which mostly serve to frame his discussions of historical materialism and class conflict, as well as giving an offhand example of the "cant" he felt was pervading much socialist ideology, Bernstein argues that there is an essential difference between the purposes of the scientific and policy-oriented sides of socialist ideology:

> Social and political doctrines are distinguished *inter alia* from the relevant sciences by the fact that they are closed off precisely where these remain open. They lie under the dictate of certain purposes, in which it is not a matter of insight but rather about *volition*, and which lend them, even if in certain points they leave space open for new insights, a *finished* and *permanent* character. But scientific sociology is never closed off, because its object, society, is a living organism and because, regarding the laws that apply for this organism, it knows no final truths in the last instance.[15]

By taking a partisan stance on the state of societal conditions, socialist practice is incapable of exercising the "*scientific unbiasedness*" that is the essential criterion of accurate analysis. Certainly, Bernstein is keen that socialism "builds on the foundation of scientific insight and acknowledges this as the element that gives it direction", but the label "scientific socialist" can only at best apply where socialism uses this scientific insight to remain critically self-aware of the foundations of its doctrine:

> The name scientific socialism retains its full justification for me when the concept "scientific" in it is defined precisely in its critical sense, as a *postulate* and *programme*—as a demand that socialism makes of itself, and which conveys the idea that for what it wants the scientific method and insight have directive force.[16]

Citing Antonio Labriola—and anticipating the much later arguments of the Frankfurt School—Bernstein argues that the understanding of scientific socialism he endorses is best described as "critical socialism", with critique understood in a Kantian sense as "scientific criticism [*wissenschaftlicher Kritizismus*]".[17] It is not that Bernstein opposes the idea that socialism has to be scientific; rather, in order to "discover […] *what is actually the case* in its social contexts" and avoid straying into idle speculation, socialism has to be very clear about the limits on how far science can justify the contents of its social programme.[18] He analogises the relationship with the jealous boundary policing between the disciplines of sociology and social policy, arguing that the hard divide between the conditional diagnoses/prognoses of the former and the more general prescriptions of the latter is "fundamentally justified and advisable"—even if socialists ultimately ended up doing a bit of both.[19]

At the same time, in order for socialism to retain its solid grounding in scientific social analysis, Bernstein saw it as absolutely vital to replicate a sociology/social-policy division of functions within the movement itself. He was deeply concerned at the tendency of the party-activist side of the movement to intervene in theoretical debates, in a way that he felt was proving increasingly detrimental to the ability of party theorists to engage in sincere rigorous enquiry. When Bernstein is talking about the relationship between theorists and activists, it is not hard—given his own experience at the SPD conferences during the revisionist controversy—to think of his arguments as at least on some level self-referential. After all, as he wrote on his SPD membership card in 1902, he identified first and foremost as a *Schriftsteller*, even if his socialist activities were far from limited to literary work. But it was more the SPD's summary expulsion of the social-imperialist Gerhard Hildebrand from the party in 1912 for "gross violation of the basic principles of the party programme", after he questioned whether socialisation of the economy should be the goal of Social Democracy, that riled Bernstein into adopting a stance strongly in favour of greater siloisation.[20] He insists that science cannot be subject to external interference, either intrinsically and instrumentally: "Science is not free if

it is subject to any considerations whatsoever that do not arise from its own laws".[21] The essentialising arguments at the heart of 'scientific socialism' risked the ability of critical, scientifically-rigorous social theory to give social-democratic practice the proper guidance in pursuit of its aims. They also risked losing Social Democracy valuable support among the educated and academic *strata* of society, on the (in Bernstein's view entirely false) assumption that the proletariat's ascent to power would mean an end to "freedom of science", and "intellectual dependency" on the whims of the newly-empowered mass population.[22]

He attributes these rising tensions to the growth and increasing success of the socialist movement as it settled into the 'long game' of class struggle, and the novelty of intellectual radicalism lost its appeal to all but an interested minority of its members:

> In the beginnings of the movement, a ravenous hunger for theoretical readings prevailed among the workers who had been gripped by socialism. […] Today, it has receded a lot, and traces of a certain cloying satiation show themselves vis-à-vis everything that looks like theory.[23]

But socialism cannot afford to do without the theoretical side of its ideological project. There is a clear difference, for Bernstein, between coming to positions that radically deviate from established socialist principles as a result of theoretical critique, versus mere practical opportunism. The latter is obviously dangerous for ideological integrity, but the former must be treated far more charitably. Paradoxically, in order to keep the contact and unity between theory and practice constant and stable, socialists had to allow a division of labour to emerge between the two activities:

> Nobody is challenging the party's right to set down certain norms for membership of it, and to insist on observing certain rules of party-comradely discipline. Render unto the party the things which are the party's. But precisely for that reason it matters that it adheres firmly to this proposition: *Render unto science the things which are science's.*[24]

Bernstein's point articulates the sentiment that *ne supra crepidam sutor judicaret* ("the shoemaker must not judge beyond the shoe")—a statement he himself cites explicitly as early as 1894.[25] Theorists and activists have to have the requisite respect for the different functions each of them performed on behalf of the socialist movement; only in that way might

socialists stand a chance of accurately and efficaciously achieving their social goals.

Bernstein's second major concern is related to the first, but is more practice-oriented, and concerns socialism's ability to achieve societal transformation wholly autonomously as a social movement. Where his first concern addressed internal relations within the socialist movement, this one turns to its external relations with other societal groups; specifically, rival parties and their governing ideologies. Bernstein is motivated here by helping socialists devise the most effective way to achieve progress, defined as the attainment of cooperative societal well-being:

> Progress means further development in the direction of a given goal, and the objectively given goal of societal development is and must be to bring about the highest possible general state of wellbeing through the highest possible unfolding and the most harmonious possible cooperation [*Zusammenwirken*] of all the economic and intellectual forces of society.[26]

Prima facie, of course, for socialism progress is about improving the position of the worst-off in society, and however socialists seek to confront the theoretical and practical problems that Bernstein identifies, their solution must be one that continues to place the needs and expectations of the working class at the centre of their programme. But, in Bernstein's view, improvement for the working class coincides with class-transcending improvements for society at large:

> The class of wage-labourers can foster their progress today in no way at all other than by working towards the material and intellectual preconditions of general societal progress.[27]

In this light, it is unsurprising that, even though the working class is at the centre of its programme, socialism is no longer the only ideology—and Social Democracy no longer the only party—whose general visions for society now speak to the working class, and the popular mass more broadly.

Conversely, the working class is also not the only *stratum* that socialism and Social Democracy can speak to either. Other classes—from the petty bourgeoisie to the industrial-commercial bourgeoisie to the large landowners—acknowledge the alignment between working-class and societal improvement. This forces their representative ideologies and parties into periodic progressive turns:

> [They] cannot flourish without the continuation of economic forward development, and so at least a great part of their members must in the deciding moments again and again come down on the side of parties that fight for social progress in one way or another.[28]

In fact, Bernstein muses, in many countries bourgeois-radical parties were making such shifts towards the progressive left on a more permanent basis, and still largely holding their own electorally.[29] This creates the conceptual space and tactical scope for socialists to form coalitions with other classes and parties to make headway on their progressive aims. Indeed, this may also be a necessary part of socialists' future strategy, not least because there is no successful historical precedent for a *pure* class revolution by the previously oppressed; rather, most social revolutions start with periods of power-sharing between classes.[30] The answer, for Bernstein, may have to involve forming a progressive coalition, or "left bloc":

> The conquest of political power, the development of political-democratic institutions is frequently only to be attained and secured through coalitions of the social-democratic workers' parties with the bourgeois-democratic parties.[31]

For Bernstein, this is not a source of despair for socialists, but one of opportunity. It is already a partial political revolution if the working class secures a share in political power, allowing it to pursue the first points on its social reform agenda. Socialists should not limit themselves to thinking only in binaries of *pure* bourgeois or *pure* proletarian rule, but seize the chance of part-proletarianising existing institutions whenever they have the chance.

So whom should socialists turn to when forming such a progressive coalition? In Bernstein's view, the two likeliest partners for this are social liberalism and Christian Democracy, in the form of Free-Minded [*freisinnig*] parties and *Zentrum*—parties who had tried the hardest to cast themselves as having *Volkspartei* status. On liberalism, Bernstein raises to the ideological level the Marxian claim about the "civilising effects" of capitalism, acknowledging that it was the source of many beneficial insights that helped lay the foundation for progress as socialists conceive of it:

> The one-sidednesses and excesses of economic liberalism cannot make one forget the great piece of truth that it contains. It was for its time a necessary, fruitful insight.…

> And what is to be said about economic liberalism also applies to political liberalism, or […] to liberalism as a *worldview*. Yes, to a certain degree it is still true of it—of the idea of the right of all those who become capable of life against everything that is upheld by tradition.[32]

But in its societally progressive role, liberalism has now been superseded by socialism. True democratic liberals have to understand the historical role of the working class, and be amenable to cooperation with socialism:

> [T]he test for the authenticity of liberal, that is, freedom-oriented [*freiheitlich*] sentiment today lies nowhere other than in its stance towards socialism, towards the workers' movement, towards the working class's struggle for emancipation. Anyone whose liberalism does not retain its colours here is not someone who much is to be thought of at all.…
>
> The politician who holds democratic institutions close to heart, so who is liberal in the great world-historical sense of the word, is required precisely by the logic of facts to become inwardly acquainted with socialism, to grasp its historical mission, to strive for an understanding with it.[33]

This, traditionally, is where the liberals of the Free-Minded tendency fall down. The period in which Bernstein is writing coincided with a nearly two-decade period of instability in the German bourgeois left, with Free-Mindedness [*Freisinn*] divided into multiple factions. Some, like Theodor Barth and the Free-Minded Union [*Freisinnige Vereinigung*], were amenable to cooperation with Social Democracy, indeed advocated strongly in favour of it, and hence constituted plausible allies [*bündnisfähig*] for the socialist movement.[34] But others, like the Free-Minded People's Party [*Freisinnige Volkspartei*] led by Eugen Richter, entertained what Bernstein saw as grand delusions of acting as major kingmakers in the centre-ground that were entirely at odds with their electoral position, demanding that socialist voters align behind them while simultaneously maintaining a rigid anti-socialist policy position:

> [I]n their eyes, Social Democracy does not even have any right to claim its own representation […] at all, or that compared to the Conservatives, etc., it even represents the greater evil.[35]

In other words, social liberals might be socialists' close neighbours in principle, but a fairly unreliable partner with whom to build lasting progressive plans. *Zentrum*, meanwhile, was also prone to its own reactionary

backsliding, but had exhibited enough "democratic oppositional spirit" to side with the Free-Minders on most political issues, and enough capacity for communitarian mass mobilisation to count at the pro-worker end of the bourgeois spectrum.[36]

It is interesting that, in advocating collaboration with social liberals and Christian democrats, Bernstein is prefiguring the post-WW1 'Weimar coalition' of the SPD, *Zentrum*, and the German Democratic Party (DDP), successor to the Free-Minded tradition. But Bernstein does not consider either of them ideal partners; it is more that, of the available options, liberal welfarism and Catholic social policy are the only ideologies who are even half-sincere in their claims to be 'social'. Certainly, neither of them are a replacement for a strong Social Democracy, and socialists' priority must continue to be securing the election of a sizeable number of their own to representative political bodies, in order to give an authentic voice to workers' needs and expectations at the highest levels:

> The more deputies Social Democracy gets into the parliament by its own strength, the more independent its representation […] will in turn thereby become from the liberal-democratic bourgeois left.[37]

In turn, the presence of 'pure' socialist/working-class deputies strengthens the hand of Social Democracy when refining the precise dynamics of its cooperation with bourgeois progressives—especially in terms of who leads the coalition. Bernstein reminds socialists never to forget that "the future belongs and is owed to socialism", and on that basis insist that Social Democracy has to be the dominant partner in any progressive alliance.[38] At the very least, such an alliance must be formed on the basis of reciprocity. Social Democracy pays bourgeois radicals the respect of taking their essential core demands seriously, such as on fiscal and religious policy; the least that these radicals could do is treat Social Democracy's demands the same in return, rather than as skittish wills-o'-the-wisp on the part of the working class:

> In those circles, they are only too inclined to view and treat the demands that Social Democracy has to pose in a coalition if it is not to give itself up entirely, as a matter of mere mood or some agitatory desire *du jour*. … Social Democracy has provided ample evidence that it does not expect any sacrifices from the bourgeois centrist parties that they cannot make without

> taking damage to their soul; hence, it *must* and *may demand the same treatment from them in return*.[39]

Ultimately, there are no hard-and-fast rules, no "formula that fits all contexts", that can govern whether or not socialists should pursue coalition opportunities.[40] The decision over whether or not to cooperate with bourgeois progressives, radicals, democrats, and republicans has to be on a case-by-case basis:

> [It is] dependent not on any consideration of formal aspects, but simply on the prospective *effect* on the *general political situation* and *development*.[41]

But socialists have to at least embrace the *possibility of possibilism*:

> Social Democracy means welcoming every honest alliance [*Bundesgenossenschaft*] that is willing to help wage the struggle against [reactionary] powers.[42]

Only by seizing every opportunity that opens the door to empowerment in this way can socialists ensure that they continue to play a major role in driving forward the progress they are committed to realising in society.

The Workers' Perspective on Society: Bernstein's Account of Socialist Ideology

These twin problems—one of social theory, one of social-democratic practice—form the backdrop to Bernstein's discussion of socialism. In the works collected in this volume, Bernstein undertakes the task of explicitly articulating his own understanding of socialist ideology, beyond the more passing comments he devotes to it in *Preconditions of Socialism* and other earlier writings.[43] The first and longest text, *Der Sozialismus Einst und Jetzt: Streitfragen des Sozialismus in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, here translated as *Socialism Past and Present: Historical and Contemporary Disputes within Socialism*, was originally conceived as a series of lectures Bernstein was invited to give in the summer semester of 1921 at the University of Berlin—with the exception of his final chapter, which he added later when preparing the text for publication in 1922.[44] Over the course of the book, Bernstein traces the intellectual, economic, and political history of the socialist movement. He outlines the contributions of a

succession of thinkers—among others, Robert Owen, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Karl Rodbertus, Lassalle, and of course Marx and Engels—who, in his view, informed and profoundly shaped the development of socialists' social outlook and demands. In doing so, Bernstein moves between themes that were and are of central salience in socialist thought, including the nature of class and class struggle, theories of the state, and the importance of parliamentary democracy.

It is not entirely clear whether Bernstein intended *Socialism Past and Present* as a sequel or companion volume to *Preconditions*—although he issued a revised and expanded edition of the latter in 1921, around the same time as he was giving the original lectures. All the same, there are moments of fascinating mirroring between the two texts, both thematically and structurally. Both feature extensive analyses of the class structure of society in (respectively) the 1890s and 1900s, viewed in both occupational and income-level terms; both discuss the centrality or otherwise of the Marxian labour theory of value to socialist ideology; and both devote extensive sections to the relationship between socialism and parliamentary democracy.[45] Some parts are functionally equivalent, but for the requirements of changed historical contexts: the somewhat abstract discussion of Blanquism in *Preconditions* is replaced by the live debate over the Leninist—or, to stay with Bernstein's term, Bolshevist—"perversion of socialism" in *Socialism Past and Present*.[46] Yet there are also significant differences. Gone is the discussion of historical materialism and Hegelian dialectics, to be replaced by intellectual-historical analyses of utopianism, natural rights, and a far deeper analysis of statism.[47] When combined with the far broader 'castlist' of figures it considers, this gives the palpable impression that, whereas *Preconditions* is extensively a book about Marxism *simpliciter*, *Socialism Past and Present* has broadened its view to socialism *tout entier*—i.e., socialism beyond just Marxism.

The second part of this volume consists of five shorter texts, all written before *Socialism Past and Present*, which contextualise and build up to Bernstein's late engagement with socialist ideology. The first of them, *Die soziale Doktrin des Anarchismus*, translated as *The Social Doctrine of Anarchism*, was in fact a series of seven articles that appeared in *Neue Zeit*—the first two (equivalent to §§I and II) in December 1891, and the remainder in July–September 1892.[48] The earliest work in this collection, it is a voluminous engagement with key figures in the intellectual canon of anarchism, masquerading as ostensibly an extended review of the egoist anarchist John Henry Mackay's book *The Anarchists: A Picture of*

Civilisation at the Close of the Nineteenth Century.[49] Bernstein uses the opportunity to conduct a detailed exegesis of the ideas of Max Stirner, Proudhon, and Mikhail Bakunin, as well as some passing comments on Peter Kropotkin. Highly unusually from the perspective of contemporary anarchism studies, Bernstein sees Stirner's eclectic individualist anarchism as by far the truest and most consistent exposition of the ideology, and he probes with forensic diligence what he sees as the unquestioned "bourgeois" content of both his and Proudhon's social theories.[50] Anarchists of a Bakuninist stripe, meanwhile, propagate unstable "anarcho-communist hybrids", which neither shed their bourgeois elements nor offer the working class the most effective tools for their emancipation.[51]

The second text, *Zur Frage: Sozialliberalismus oder Kollektivismus?*, translated as *Social Liberalism or Collectivism*, was originally an article in *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, reissued in a special printing in the middle of 1900.[52] In it, Bernstein is responding to attempts by the sociologist Franz Oppenheimer to claim him as a "kindred spirit" in his efforts to give bourgeois radicalism a more progressive reformist edge—specifically, to build a bridge with socialism by adding thicker layers of content to the new concept of "social liberalism". Oppenheimer argues that socialist agitation in the form of electoral and trade-union struggle is a necessary but not sufficient means to bring about the end of capitalism, and suggests a model of "settlement cooperatives" as a vital complementary tool to do so.[53] Bernstein objects strongly to Oppenheimer's efforts to recruit him into the social-liberal fold, and rejects Oppenheimer's attempt to retain a decisive role for free competition in the economy as standing in fundamental tension with the 'social' label he is trying to claim.[54] He closes by arguing that

> the term *social-liberal*, like the term *social-democratic*, is a tautology; there is no liberalism and no democratism [*Demokratismus*] that would not be social in nature. Social-liberal only makes sense as a contraction of socialist-and-liberal, as a shorter version of *liberal-socialist*.[55]

As a consequence, for Bernstein, social liberalism ends up with two choices: either it accepts the need for societal control of the economy, in which case it collapses into Social Democracy; or it rejects it, in which case it becomes an unsustainable contradiction in terms.

The other three texts in this part were all originally delivered by Bernstein as lectures, and were subsequently published as standalone books more

or less rapidly afterwards. *Wie ist wissenschaftlicher Sozialismus möglich?*, translated as *How is Scientific Socialism Possible?*, was held in front of the Berlin Social-Scientific Students' Association [*Sozialwissenschaftlicher Studentenverein*] in May 1901, and then immediately seized upon for special publication by the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*.[56] This is Bernstein's most extended engagement with the relationship between scientific social enquiry and social-democratic policy, which starts with an evaluation of the scientific insights that Marxism has brought to the socialist movement. He traces the deep association between science and socialism, even within the older utopian tendencies in the movement, and insists that socialists must retain a healthy respect for the perpetual inexhaustibility of the questions their social-scientific allies set out to answer. *Was ist Sozialismus?*, translated as *What is Socialism?*, was delivered at the end of December 1918 to a packed audience in the Berlin *Philharmonie*, only seven weeks after the declaration of the new German Republic.[57] Released as a book in early 1922 after what Bernstein describes as repeated enquiries to make the text publicly available, this work offers his intellectual and sociological account of how socialism came to become the ideology of the workers' movement. He concludes with an evaluation of the post-WW1 context in which socialists find themselves, and counsels patient, creative work in building the conditions to bring socialist society closer to realisation. Finally in this part, *Die Sozialisierung der Betriebe: Leitgedanken für eine Theorie des Sozialisierens*, translated as *The Socialisation of Enterprises: Guiding Principles for a Theory of Socialisation*, was held at a meeting of the political science seminar at the University of Basel in February 1919, and published later that year with a preface by Robert Michels, who had originally invited Bernstein to speak.[58] Here, Bernstein confronts the question of how to establish social control over economic production, and starts with an overview of how the awareness of the historical conditionality of this task became established in the socialist movement. He then turns to examine which parts of the economy are better- and worse-placed for immediate direct economic takeover, and closes with a brief discussion of alternative approaches that could be used to achieve similar ends.

The third part of the volume presents a range of articles that Bernstein published in the two main theoretical organs of German Social Democracy, *Neue Zeit* and *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, as well as several other documents from the last years of his literary output. In these pieces, Bernstein provides additional theoretical explication or case-specific application of the

ideas he develops in his major texts on ideology and socialist theory—above all on 'scientific socialist' methodology, the role of the working class, and democratic strategy. The articles fall into three more-or-less discrete phases, which correspond to the three main periods of Bernstein's activity as a socialist ideologist. Those in the first phase, starting with 'A Piece of Materialist Propaganda-Writing' and continuing up until 'Two Political Programmatic Symphonies', cover a period from 1893 to 1897, and show Bernstein playing point-defence on various issues in socialism, again using the forum of book reviews to launch into theoretical and methodological discussions.[59] Most of these articles were written before the first series of his 'Problems of Socialism' articles appeared in *Neue Zeit*, which ran from October 1896 to April 1897; the last one was published in the interlude before the start of the second series of 'Problems of Socialism' articles in September 1897. The second phase of articles, which picks up with 'Idealism, the Theory of Struggle, and Science' and closes with 'Science, Value-Judgments, and the Party', are from between 1901 and 1912, and show Bernstein steadily moving from responding to criticisms of his view of the socialism–science relationship onto preoccupations with class struggle and electoral strategy.[60] All of them appeared in *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, after Bernstein's acrimonious severing of ties with the editorial staff of *Neue Zeit*. The final phase of documents are from Bernstein's post-WW1 output, which coincided with a gradual let-up in his journalistic activity.[61] At the start of the 1920s, Bernstein's energies were consumed with activity on behalf of the SPD—as Reichstag deputy for Potsdam (Teltow-Beeskow) and architect of the party's 1921 Görlitz Programme—as well as producing a prolific output of larger literary projects, including both *Socialism Past and Present* and *What is Socialism?* (both 1922) and the expanded edition of *Preconditions of Socialism* (1921), but also his histories of the 1848–1849 French and 1918–1919 German revolutions (both 1921), and a collection of economic writings (1920).[62] The effect of this in practice was that most of the pieces from this phase remained unpublished, and hence belong to his literary *Nachlass*, which lies in the holdings of the International Institute for Social History. Nevertheless, the content of these later pieces indicates that Bernstein's focus on some of the themes in his earlier phases continued to preoccupy him well into his twilight years.

The first point that emerges clearly from these writings is that Bernstein finds socialism to be an ideology that somewhat resists easy definition. In part, this is because there is a remarkably divergent range of views even

among self-declared socialists regarding the meaning of the ideology they subscribe to—views that may overlap to an extent but often exhibit limited consistency. Bernstein gives a flavour of this diversity of meanings at the start of *What is Socialism?*:

> Some understand under socialism an imaginary state of affairs, while others think of a movement, a development, yet others of a policy, or rather a political system, and others further think of a theory or an insight.[63]

In *Socialism Past and Present*, meanwhile, he distils this list into three competing definitions:

> The word socialism […] is frequently used as the expression for an imagined state of affairs that is underpinned by a certain property order and economic order, and which is to be embodied in an entire ideal state. Others set it as equivalent in meaning to the movement or struggle by societal classes to realise such an economic order, and for others still it is the collective term for a number of demands for institutions that are underpinned by certain ideas of right and ethical concepts.[64]

In Bernstein's view, none of these three definitions fully captures socialism by itself; with each of them, "[a] partial piece is identified more or less correctly, but the matter itself is not exhausted".[65] But what they clearly show is the urgent need for clarificatory work on what socialism is, including to what extent it can be a semi-blurred map of quasi-contestable concepts in shifting relations to one another, versus a systematically-delineated well-defined schema.

Bernstein's own view is shaped by his profound dislike of utopian tendencies in socialist literature. Post-Marx and Engels, he does not believe it is possible any longer to sustain a view of socialism as a form of alternative present; instead, it must be conceived as a future that lies somewhere along a historical trajectory. The implication of this is that speculation on what socialism looks like is no longer about how to make the present *better* but how to make the future *at all*—i.e., it is by definition more remote *and* more open to change, and the more it is both of these the more speculative it becomes, and the less it lends itself to "a fixed view of the future".[66] Accounts of societal order or lists of social demands cannot be static from the time-sliced perspective of the present; they must evolve dynamically to reflect the changing perspective over time on the way into