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# CANT AGAINST KANT

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by  
Georgi? Valentinovich Plekhanov

Forgotten Books

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Georgi Plekhanov  
**Cant Against Kant**  
**or Herr Bernstein's Will and Testament**  
**(August 1901)**

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(E. Bernstein, *Historical Materialism*  
Translated by L. Kantsel  
Second Edition. St. Petersburg, 1901)

Dead is my boy, dead and gone, dear Kasyanovna ...  
*Nekrasov* [1\*]

Die Todten reiten schnell.  
*G.A. Bürger* [2\*]

Herr Bernstein has ceased to exist for the school of Marx, to which he once belonged. He no longer provides any grounds for irritation: after all one cannot feel irritation against the dead. It is now quite useless to feel regret over him: regret can change nothing. Yet, we should pay our last respects to the departed, so we shall devote several pages to his book, which has created so much ado in socialist circles all over the civilized world, and has been translated into Russian, in which language it has now come out in a second edition in St. Petersburg.

It is common knowledge that, in this book, Herr Bernstein has subjected the theory of Marx and Engels to a “critical revision”. For our part, we shall make some critical remarks concerning the results of that “revision”.

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# I

Herr Bernstein has remarked that “the most important element of the basis of Marxism, i.e., its fundamental law, one that runs through its entire system, is its specific historical theory, which bears the name of historical materialism”. That is wrong. Indeed, the materialist explanation of history is one of the main distinctive features of Marxism, but that explanation comprises merely a *part of the materialist world-outlook of Marx and Engels*. That is why critical research into their system should begin with a critique of the general *philosophical* foundations of that world outlook. And since its method is indubitably the soul of any philosophical system, any critique of the *dialectical method* of Marx and Engels should naturally precede a “revision” of their historical theory.

True to his erroneous view of the “fundamental law” of Marxism, Herr Bernstein begins with a criticism of the materialist understanding of history and it is only in the second chapter of his book that he goes over to an appraisal of the dialectical method. For our part, we shall remain faithful to our view concerning the decisive importance of method in any serious system, and shall begin with *dialectics*.

What has Herr Bernstein to say about dialectics?

He does not refuse to recognise that it has some merits. Moreover, he acknowledges that it has had a useful influence on historical science. In his words. F.A. Lange was quite right when he said in his *Labour Question* that Hegelian historical philosophy and its fundamental proposition –

development through opposites and their reconciliation – may be called an almost anthropological discovery. (p. 39) However, together with that selfsame Lange, he thinks that “both in the life of the individual and in history, development through opposites does not take place with such ease and so radically, with such precision and symmetry, as in speculative constructions” (same page). Marx and Engels failed to realise that, which is why dialectics exerted a deleterious influence on their social-political views. True, the founders of scientific socialism felt averse to contemplative constructions. Convinced materialists, they tried “to turn that dialectics right side up again”, which, with Hegel, “stood on its head”, i.e.. *upside down*. But Herr Bernstein thinks that solving such a problem is not so easy: “as always happens in reality, as soon as we abandon the ground of empirically established facts and begin to think by by-passing them, we find ourselves in the world of derived ideas; if, in that case, we follow the laws of dialectics as established by Hegel, we shall find ourselves, before even being aware of that, again in the clutches of the ‘selfdevelopment of notions’. Herein lies the great scientific danger to the Hegelian logic of contradictions” (This should read: *the danger of the logic of contradictions*. We say: Mme. Kantsel has translated Herr Bernstein very poorly) (p.37). Failing to see that danger, Marx and Engels were unable to avoid it, and were therefore often led into error by their own method. Thus, for instance, in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* they voiced the idea that, in Germany, the bourgeois revolution could be an immediate prologue to the workers’ revolution. [3\*] This supposition (“*could be*”) proved groundless: the bourgeois revolution of 1848 did not serve as an immediate prologue to the workers’ revolution. Why was it that Marx and Engels were mistaken? *Because*

*they adhered to dialectics.* That, at least, is what Herr Bernstein says. Another instance: since, in 1885, Engels, writing on the occasion of a new edition of Marx's booklet *Enthüllungen über den Kommunistenprozess*, and, in 1887, in the preface to his booklet *Zur Wohnungsfrage*, expressed ideas which, in Bernstein's opinion, are hard to reconcile with his violently negative attitude to the well-known rebellion of the "young" in the German Social-Democracy, that took place several years later [4\*], *here again the blame lies with dialectics.* If the reader has the least doubt of this statement, he has only to read the following passage: "This ambiguity, which is so little in keeping with Engels's character, ultimately sprang from the dialectics borrowed from Hegel" (p.44). Regrettably enough, this sentence does not contain the least trace of "ambiguity". If, convinced of this, you will ask Herr Bernstein why it is that dialectics is conducive to ambiguity, you will get the following explanation: "its 'yes is no, and no is yes', instead of 'yes is yes, and no is no'; its mutual transition of opposition, and its conversion of quantity into quality, and other dialectical pearls have always been an obstacle to a clear-cut idea of the significance of recognised changes" (same page).

If "dialectical pearls" have *always* hampered any clear-cut idea of changes that take place in reality, then the dialectical method; is obviously erroneous in its very essence and should be utterly rejected by all those who, holding the truth dear, aspire towards a correct understanding of Nature and social life. The only question that remains unsolved in this connection is: how have dialectical "pearls" which are far removed from any beauty ledi Hegel and his philosophy of history to what Herr Bernstein,, echoing Lange, has

acknowledged to be an “almost anthropological discovery”? The little word “*almost*”, which Herr Bernstein stresses so heavily, explains nothing in this case and can only serve as fresh confirmation of the old truth that *words* are in place only where *notions* are absent. [5\*] Incidentally, Herr Bernstein could be made a gift of this “*ambiguity*” if he made the least attempt to *prove* the justice of his opinion regarding the harm of “*dialectical pearls*”. However, with him, proofs are conspicuously absent: he has nowhere to get them from, *since he himself has not made so bold as to assert that he has ever studied Hegel. If it came into his head to claim to have done so, it would be very easy to show that he is ... in error.* That is why Herr Bernstein has not even attempted to prove his opinion, which he has simply *voiced*, believing, with good reason, that naive readers will always be found who will not only take his word but will even admire his profundity of thought.

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## II

*Habent sua fata libelli*, the Romans said. Writers, too, have their fates, and at times most strange fates. Let us take Hegel as an example. How *few* in number are those, who have gone to the trouble of studying his philosophy; at the same time, how *numerous* are those “critics” who permit themselves to pass helter-skelter judgement on it! The selfsame frivolous people would be profoundly shocked if someone took upon himself to condemn Herr Bernstein’s book, without even reading it. Whence such different yardsticks? Why is it that such frivolity is permissible in respect of the great Hegel whereas it will be generally considered impermissible in respect of the petty Herr Bernstein? “That is the question.” [1]

If Herr Bernstein *knew* the subject he judges of so naively and so clumsily, he would, of course, feel shame at his opinion of dialectics. He thinks that the dialectical “yes is no, and no is yes”, by hampering a sober attitude towards reality, places us in the power of the “self-development of notions”. But just that, is the shortcoming in the metaphysical thinking, whose devices Herr Bernstein characterizes with the formula “yes is yes, and no is no”.

“Youth is wont to engage in abstractions,” says Hegel, “whereas one who has experience of life is not carried away by the abstract ‘either ... or’, but adheres to concrete ground.” These simple words can provide a highly satisfactory characterization of the difference between dialectics, on the one hand, and thinking according to the following formula, so dear to Herr Bernstein’s heart: “yes is yes, and no is no”, on the other.

That formula is the selfsame “*abstract either ... or*”, a proneness to which, according to Hegel, is peculiar to youth. That the “*abstract either ... or*” hampered, for a long time, the proper posing of questions in social life and even in the natural sciences is something that is now known to all and sundry. In our country, the distinctive nature of a *dialectical* attitude to the object of study was revealed very popularly and clearly by the late N.G. Chernyshevsky. From the viewpoint of dialectics, “a definitive judgement can be made only in respect of a definite fact after all the circumstances it depends on have been examined ... For instance, is rain a blessing or an evil? This is an abstract question which cannot be answered definitively: rain is sometimes useful but sometimes, if more rarely, causes harm; one should ask definitively: has rain been useful if it fell after the wheat sowing has been completed, and it lasted for five hours? In this case a definitive answer can be given: yes, it has been useful.” It was from the same angle that, according to Chernyshevsky’s absolutely correct explanation, Hegel’s dialectical philosophy looked upon social phenomena. Is war ruinous or beneficial? “In general one cannot reply here in any decisive terms: one should know which war is in question ... The Battle of Marathon was a most beneficial event in the history of mankind.” But examining phenomena from this angle means placing their study on a *concrete ground*. That is why dialectical philosophy has recognised, to quote from Chernyshevsky, that “the former general phrases used to judge of good and evil, without any examination of the causes that have given rise to a definite phenomenon – these general and abstract dicta are unsatisfactory. There is no abstract truth; truth is always concrete”.

At first glance, this might seem self-evident, but that is so only to one *who – consciously or unconsciously – has taken up the stand of dialectics* and does not consider the “*abstract either ... or*” (in other words, the formula: “yes is yes and no is no”) the most important device in thinking. For instance, ask Count Leo Tolstoy whether Chernyshevsky’s words about war, which we have just quoted, are correct or not. He will answer that they are quite wrong since war is an *evil*, and evil can never be *goodness*. Count Tolstoy passes judgement on all questions from the viewpoint of the “*abstract either ... or*”, this stripping his conclusions of any serious significance. Dialectics is entirely alien to him as a *thinker*, which, incidentally, explains his instinctive revulsion for Marxism. It is regrettable that Chernyshevsky himself often forgot that “truth is always concrete”. In his political economy, he was himself often prone towards the “*abstract either ... or*”, but this indisputable fact presents no interest to us at present. It is important for us here to remind our readers how Chernyshevsky understood so well and explained so simply and tellingly (in his *Essays on the Gogol Period in Russian Literature*) the incompatibility of the dialectical view and abstract judgements.

Anarchists often ask Social-Democrats whether they recognise the freedom of the individual, to which the latter reply that they do, but only conventionally, because *absolute freedom* for one person means *absolute slavery* for all those surrounding him, i.e., *converts freedom into its opposite*. This kind of reply is not to the liking of the anarchists, who seem sincerely to consider the Social-Democrats *enemies of freedom* and, for their part, have proclaimed *unrestricted, i.e., absolute freedom* of the individual. The conversion of freedom into its opposite is seen by them as sheer sophistry

or – as some of them might well put it after getting acquainted with Herr Bernstein’s terminology – *one of the pearls of Hegelian dialectics*. The anarchical doctrine of freedom is utterly imbued with the spirit of the “*abstract either ... or*” (*either freedom or despotism*); it is completely built on the formula, so favoured by Herr Bernstein: “*yes is yes and no is no*”, while the Social-Democrats regard the question of freedom *from the concrete point of view*. They remember that *there is no abstract truth*, and that *truth is concrete*. In this respect, they are imbued with the *spirit of dialectics*.

Of course, Herr Bernstein will willingly condemn the anarchical doctrine of freedom and will agree with the impossibility of abstract truth. Inasmuch as he will express himself in this sense, he will himself go over to the viewpoint of *dialectics*. However, he will do that *unconsciously*, in consequence of which he will be unable to get out of the muddle of notions he has fallen into. Molière’s M. Jourdain could speak in tolerable prose without even suspecting the existence of prose speech. [6\*] But when dialectics comes up for discussion by people capable only of an unconscious use of the dialectical method, they will say nothing about it except sheer nonsense.

The search after concrete truth is a distinctive feature of dialectical thinking. This very thought was expressed by Chernyshevsky when he said that, since the times of Hegel, “explaining reality has become the bounden duty of philosophical thinking” and that “hence the extraordinary attention to reality, to which no thought had formerly been given and which had been cruelly distorted to please one’s own one-sided prejudices”.

If that is so – and that is indeed so – one can easily understand the role played by dialectics in the *development of socialism from a utopia into a science*.

The French Enlighteners of the eighteenth century looked upon social life from the angle of the abstract oppositeness of good and evil, of reason and stupidity. They were constantly “falling into abstractions”. Suffice it to recall their attitude towards *feudalism* which they saw as an utter *absurdity*, and flatly refused to acknowledge that there had been a time when it was, in its way, a *rational* system of social relations. One can sometimes discern in the utopian socialists a profound dissatisfaction with eighteenth-century abstract thinking. Indeed, in their treatment of *history*, some of them sometimes abandon the abstract formula “*yes is yes, and no is no*” in favour of the dialectical point of view. However, this has been *only at times*, the vast majority of them remaining satisfied, in the overwhelming majority of cases, with the “*abstract either ... or*” in their disquisitions of *social life*. All their systems are imbued with the spirit of that “*either ... or*”, and it is that “*either ... or*” that has given their systems their *utopian nature*. To turn from a *utopia* into a *science*, socialism had to outgrow this device in thinking, and rise to the dialectical method. It was Marx and Engels who carried out this necessary reform in socialism: however, they could do so *only because* they had previously gone through the school of Hegelian philosophy. They themselves freely acknowledged that they owed very much to the dialectical method but it pleases Herr Bernstein that this should be otherwise. He has told us that the development of socialism from a utopia into a science took place *despite* dialectics, not *thanks to* it. [This of course, is very strong wording, but is just as lacking in proof as the

outstanding thought once voiced by Mr. L. Tikhomirov in his booklet *Why I Stopped Being a Revolutionary*, namely, that Russian literature developed *thanks to* the autocracy, not *despite* it.]

Herr Bernstein is firmly convinced that Hegel and his pupils looked down on clear-cut notions, considering them *metaphysics*. The reader has already learnt from Chernyshevsky's words what close attention to reality was demanded by Hegel's dialectical philosophy. However, close attention to reality is impossible without clear-cut notions, which is why one has to assume that, in this case too, Herr Bernstein has failed to understand the great thinker. Indeed, that is how the matter stands, in proof of which it will suffice to read (and, of course, understand) Paragraph 80 of Hegel's big *Encyklopädie*, which runs as follows:

### *Paragraph*

“Thinking, as intelligence, stops short of clear-cut determinateness and its distinction from any other determinateness; it regards such limited abstraction as existing for itself and endowed with being.”

### *Supplement to Paragraph*

“Rational thinking should first and foremost be given its due, and in the same way recognition should go to the service it has rendered inasmuch as without rational thinking it is impossible to arrive at anything firm and definite either in the area of theory or in practice. Cognition begins with existing things being taken in their definite distinctions. Thus, for instance, in a study of Nature, distinctions are made between individual substances, forces, kinds, etc. and are denoted in this isolation. Science's further success consists in a transition from the viewpoint of the *ratio* to that of *reason* which studies each of these phenomena – as registered by the ratio as separated by a precipice from all the

others – in the process of its transition into another phenomenon, in the process of its inception and destruction.”

Anyone capable of seeing, behind *words*, the *notions* linked with them will agree – unembarrassed by Hegel’s terminology which sounds so strange today – that the road of investigation he has indicated is that very road following which the science of today – for instance, natural science – has arrived at its most outstanding theoretical achievements.

Far from ignoring the rights of the *ratio* (and consequently of *clear-cut notions*) Hegel energetically defended its rights even in areas which might seem very far removed from the “rational”, i.e., in philosophy, religion and art. He made the reined remark that any successful work of drama presupposes a number of clearcut characters. As for philosophy, that, in his words, *calls first and foremost* for precision (*Präzision*) of thought! [2]

But what does the real character of Hegelian philosophy matter to Herr Bernstein? Of what concern to him is Hegel’s *Encyklopädie* in general, and any of its paragraphs in particular? He is well aware that he will always find readers who will applaud him even if they notice his errors. *He actually “criticises” Marx! He is attempting to destroy the Marxist “dogma”.* That is quite enough today to win resounding fame. Of course, it is also not a bad idea to make a study of what you are out to criticise, but that can well be got along without ...

Herr Bernstein sets great store by his own common sense, but Engels was quite right when he said that common sense is a good thing only as long as it does not emerge from the confines of its own competence. The lengths to which Herr

Bernstein's words have taken him are shown by the following consideration he has voiced, not, incidentally, in the book under review but in an article he published in *Neue Zeit* after the appearance of the book. [7\*]

In his well-known work on Ludwig Feuerbach, Engels says that the world as seen by dialectics is a sum of *processes*, in which *things* and their images in the mind, i.e., *notions*, do not remain immobile, but are in a state of constant change. In principle (“*prinzipiell*”), Herr Bernstein “of course” finds this proposition a correct one, but he is unaware of the limits within which it remains correct, and of the way the words “*constant change*” are to be understood. As he puts it, *the changes the organism of any particular man is subject to are nevertheless incapable of turning him into a creature of quite a different kind*. Such profundity of thought might well have been envied by Sancho Panza himself. Yet does Herr Bernstein really think Hegel and the Hegelians were capable of losing sight, even for a single instant, of so profound, longstanding and praiseworthy a truth? As though foreseeing the appearance of “critics” *à la* Bernstein, Hegel drew the attention of his listeners to the development of any given phenomenon being able to make *actual* only that which is contained within it as a *possibility (an sich)*. He quoted *plants* as an example, saying that though a plant does change, that takes place in accordance with the nature of its embryo, so that the plant “is not simply lost in its infinite change”. [3] After that, judge for yourselves whether there was any need for Herr Bernstein's profound remark!

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### III

Herr Bernstein asserts that Marx exaggerated the rapidity of the historical advance. This is true in respect of Marx's view regarding the development of *capitalist* society. But *why* was Marx disposed towards that exaggeration? Here too, Herr Bernstein puts the blame on *dialectics*. Again, *this* aspect of the influence exerted by dialectics is seen by him as most harmful and dangerous, and it is this aspect that makes him steer clear of the "pearls of dialectics". Unfortunately, however, that aspect, too exists only in his imagination.

According to Hegel, the *logical* process of negation takes place *outside of time*. However, the *actual* processes of the negation of one natural phenomenon by another, or of one social system by another are determined, *in the rapidity of their course, by their own nature*, and by the *concrete conditions* in which they take place. In this polemic with Diihring and in his book *Ludwig Feuerbach*, Engels refers to the development of the Universe as a dialectical process. *Did he exaggerate the rapidity of this process*, which, in his own words, called for extremely lengthy periods of time? We do not think so. Even were he to have fallen into that error, it would have been the fault, not of dialectics but of some other circumstances: an insufficient knowledge of natural history, a lack of attention to the subject, or something like that. The influence of dialectics on his judgement of the speed of such processes would, in that case, have been just as negligible as that of the complexion of the Empress of China.

Let us take another example, this time from the sphere of *history*. Contraposing his dialectical method to

Proudhon's abstract thinking, Marx wrote in his *Misère de la Philosophie*: "It took the whole three centuries in Germany to establish the first big division of labour, the separation of the towns from the country." [8\*] Was the speed of historical development, exaggerated here? There does not seem to be any exaggeration here either, but even if there is, dialectics has nothing at all to do with it.

Here is a third example, which hears upon *contemporary* social life. As is common knowledge, Lassalle was a firm adherent of the dialectical method, but this firm adherent of the dialectical method thought it would take from a hundred to two hundred years for the gradual elimination of "landed and capitalist property" (*des Grund- und Kapitaleigentums*). To judge by Herr Bernstein's frame of mind today, he may be expected to find even such a period too brief. He probably thinks, like Rodhertus, that the elimination just mentioned will take at least five hundred years. That, is his own affair, but Marx would have probably said that Lassalle wanted more time than was necessary for the radical reconstruction of society. Hence it follows that the Hegelians, who were all agreed in recognising the importance of the dialectical method, could appraise in highly different ways the pace of contemporary social development. Consequently if any particular adherent of dialectics really exaggerates that speed, that should be ascribed to something else but in no way to dialectics.

"We know," says Herr Bernstein, "that we think and know sufficiently well in what way we think. But we shall never learn how that takes place; in what manner consciousness arises from external impressions, the excitation of the nerves, or from a change in the position and the interaction of the atoms of the brain."

It is true that we shall never learn how consciousness arises in us, but that is not the point; the question is whether our ignorance can serve as an objection to *materialism*. “Critical” thinkers such as F.A. Lange, and even physiologists such as Du Bois-Reymond thought that it *could*; the present author is of the opinion that it *cannot*. We have proved that by excerpts from the works of La Mettrie, cited in an article directed against Herr Bernstein. [9\*] He has taken offence at us for the article but, as the reader will now see, he has understood absolutely none of our objections. “Attempts have been made,” Herr Bernstein continues, “to account for this by ascribing to the atom a certain degree of capacity for consciousness, a degree of animateness in the sense of the monad doctrine.”

Indeed, *attempts have been made*. Among the authors of such attempts was, as pointed out in our article, the *materialist* La Mettrie, though a comparison of his doctrine with Leibnitz’s doctrine of monads is somewhat far-fetched, Herr Bernstein says nothing of La Mettrie himself, though he thinks, in general, that “this” (the reference is to the above-mentioned attempt) “is an image in the mind, an assumption forced on us by our mode of thinking and our need of an integral world-outlook.”

If the reader has understood this we can only congratulate him most sincerely because he has been more fortunate than the author of these lines, or Herr Bernstein himself, who does not seem to understand what he says. *This is nothing more than a surmise!* Of course, it is not! It is something that Herr Bernstein got to understand only when he decided to deny materialism, while nobody with any understanding of the matter has passed that “this” off for something else.

But what *follows* from that “this” being a simple surmise? Is it that materialism is a hollow doctrine? That is the question, to which (here is no “*atom*” of reply either in Herr Bernstein’s former “critical” exercises or in the book under review.

Further: “An article in which I indicated this circumstance and remarked that pure materialism is ultimately idealism has provided Mr. Plekhanov with the desired pretext to attack me in *Neue Zeit* (Issue 44, 16th year, II [10\*]), accusing me of ignorance in general, and, in particular, of a complete absence of any understanding of Engels’s philosophical views. I say nothing of Mr. Plekhanov’s having arbitrarily made my words refer to things I did not touch upon; I state only that his article ends with a statement to the effect that Engels, in replying to a question from Mr. Plekhanov: ‘So do you think old Spinoza was right when he said that thought and extent are nothing but two attributes of one and the same substance?’ said, ‘Of course, old Spinoza was quite right.’”

The author of these lines was indeed greatly surprised when he saw how poorly Engels’s philosophy (and consequently Marx’s as well), has been understood by Herr Bernstein, who spent several years in close contact with Engels. In reply to Herr Bernstein’s call: “*Back to Kant*”, we invited him to *return to a study of philosophy (zurück ins Studierzimmer)*. We did not seek any pretext for an attack on Herr Bernstein. If our surprise found expression in a certain sharpness, that acerbity can be explained by our former relations with Herr Bernstein. Though to us he always seemed to be *narrow-minded* (this can be borne out by many of our closest comrades), we yet considered him a member of Marx’s school, and were amazed by the truly puerile *trifles* he had written about materialism. At the time, our sharply-worded opinion of him might have been found

somewhat unjust by some readers, but today scarcely anyone with some claim to knowledge will be found who will make so bold as to reproach us of exaggeration. *Herr Bernstein's philosophical ignorance has now revealed itself in all its lustre*, so that we shall not even invite him to return to his schoolbooks: *we can see that schoolbooks have not been written for such as he is.*

Pure materialism is ultimately idealism! But in that case, is the philosophy of Fichte and Hegel “ultimately” the philosophy of La Mettrie or Holbach?! This can be asserted only by one who has no understanding of materialism, idealism, Holbach, La Mettrie, Hegel or Fichte. Idealism undoubtedly has a common feature with materialism: a striving towards a *monist* explanation of phenomena. However, the mode in which this striving is given effect to in *materialism* is the *diametrical opposite* of the mode in which it is effected to in *idealism*, which is why materialism “ultimately” *diverges radically* from idealism.

In his call “*back to Kant*”, Herr Bernstein ought to have shown that the road being followed by materialism is wrong in one respect or another. Instead of that, he has limited himself to a “reduction” (and what clumsy and naive reduction!) of materialism to idealism. What amazing force and profundity of criticism!

And now about Spinoza. Mme. Kantsel has made a poor translation of the relevant passage in Herr Bernstein's book. Herr Bernstein says that our article, written on his “return to Kant” (whom he has never known, as is acknowledged even by his fellow-thinker Mr. Struve), is *reducible* to my

conversation with Engels, which he has quoted. That is not true.

A German comrade, who is far more competent in matters of philosophy than Herr Bernstein is, has expressed, in *Neue Zeit*, the thought that materialism as grounded in natural science does not stand up to criticism, and should not be linked with the theory of Marx and Engels, which can be very easily linked with the far more valid philosophical system of *Spinoza*. Since Herr Bernstein has incidentally referred to the article by this comrade, we have found it necessary *to reply to it as well*. We have shown that Marx and Engels never adhered to the materialism which the Spinozist comrade has called that of natural science, i.e., the materialism of Vogt and Moleschott. Further, on the basis of the works of La Mettrie and Diderot, we have shown that French eighteenth-century materialism was in essence *nothing more than a modification of Spinozism*. We have shown the same in respect of *Feuerbach* as well. It was only *after that*, when we went over to Marx and Engels, the founders of scientific socialism, that we, in noting the close affinity between their philosophical views and those of Feuerbach, voiced our conviction that their materialism was also a variety of Spinozism. Finally, as *one of the grounds* for that conviction, we referred to one of our conversations with Engels. With Herr Bernstein, it appears that our article, *in its entirety*, can be reduced to that conversation. What should these words be ascribed to: a lack of truthfulness or of understanding?

“With Spinoza,” Herr Bernstein continues, “God is the substance he ascribes these two attributes to. At all events, Spinoza identifies God with Nature, which is why Spinoza has long been denounced as a denier of God, while his philosophy

has been rejected as atheistic whereas, formally speaking, it is a kind of pantheism ... Spinoza arrived at the notion of 'God' as infinite substance with attributes already mentioned, as well as others, this in a purely speculative way; for him, law-governed thinking and being were identical. In this respect, he resembled certain materialists but it would be an arbitrary understanding of the word to call him a representative of philosophical materialism ... If by the word 'materialism' one is in general to understand something definite, then it can be only the doctrine of matter as the ultimate and sole foundation of things. But Spinoza expressly characterised his substance 'God' as non-corporeal ... Anyone is, of course, free to be a Spinozist; only, in that case, he will no longer be a materialist."

This is all that Herr Bernstein has been able to say in reply to our historical note. It is not much. However, to this little one can apply, in a certain sense, the Latin expression *non multa, sed multum*.

Spinoza resembles some materialists in his seeing law-governed thinking and being as identical. Very good. Consequently there exist materialists who acknowledge the identity of being and thinking. It appears that they do. But that is balderdash, and if Herr Bernstein *understood* the actual meaning of the words: *the identity of being and thinking*, he would of course never have discovered that identity in any single materialist. He would have seen that *recognition of the identity of being and thinking is possible only in idealism*. And then – a new and also very considerable advantage of an understanding of the subject – he would not have said that pure materialism is ultimately idealism. However, he does not understand what he is speaking of and is therefore as clumsy and helpless in his use of philosophical terminology, as the "magician" (in Gleb Uspensky's story *Songs of Need*) was clumsy and helpless in

his use of the literary language, when he promised to display to the ladies and gentlemen in the audience “the decapitation of the head, nose and other parts of the body”.

If Spinoza had recognised the identity of being and thinking, he would have been a “*pure*” idealist, i.e., something he never was. His single substance is *simultaneously both material and spiritual*. [4] In Bernstein’s words, however, Spinoza “*expressly characterised*” it as non-corporeal. How well he has understood Spinoza! Almost as well as he has understood Hegel!

All these blunders of Herr Bernstein’s are most obvious and most unpardonable; they testify to such total and absolute incompetence in the field of philosophy that the reader may well ask whether it is worthwhile dwelling on them? However, anyone who would be prone even for a minute to give a *negative* reply to that question would be making a big mistake.

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## IV

Overjoyed at Herr Bernstein's apostasy, the bourgeoisie are now lauding this "critic" to the skies; his exploits as "critic" have been proclaimed with such pomp from the housetops that a careful analysis of his arguments can provide numerous and highly interesting psychological "documents" to characterise our times. Besides, Herr Bernstein's renunciation of materialism and his striving to "*return to Kant*" [5] are not simple errors of a philosophical mind (if one could only speak of Herr Bernstein's philosophical mind); no, they have been a natural, inevitable and vivid expression of his present-day socio-political leanings, which can be expressed in the words: a *rapprochement with the advanced sections of the bourgeoisie*. "What is called the middle class," he says, "is a complex class consisting of various sections with very heterogeneous and dissimilar interests. These sections hold together as long as they are equally oppressed or as long as they are equally threatened. In this particular case we can of course speak only of the latter, i.e., that the bourgeoisie form a homogeneous reactionary mass because all their elements are equally threatened by the Social-Democrats – some in their material interests and others in their ideological interests, i.e., their religion, their patriotism, and their desire to save the country from the horrors of violent revolution" (pp. 248–49). This short quotation provides a key to an understanding of the psychology in the "revision" of Marxism undertaken by Herr Bernstein. To avoid a "threat" to the ideological interests of the bourgeoisie – and first and foremost to its *religion* – Herr Bernstein has "returned" to the viewpoint of "*critical*" philosophy, which gets along very well with

religion, while *materialism* is utterly and irreconcilably *hostile* to it. [6] To avoid a “threat” to bourgeois “*patriotism*”, he has set about refuting Marx’s proposition that the proletariat has no homeland, and speaking on German foreign policy in the tone of a “statesman” of the “*Realpolitik*” school; finally, to avoid the “threat” of the “*horrors of violent revolution*” to the bourgeoisie, he has risen up against the “*Zusammenbruchstheorie*” (which, incidentally, he himself fabricated out of some words of Marx and Engels which he had partly misunderstood and partly distorted) and attempted to prove that “class dictatorship is a sign of a lower culture ... a step backwards, political atavism”. Anyone who wishes to understand Herr Bernstein should try to understand, not so much his theoretical arguments, which contain nothing but ignorance and muddled thinking, as his practical aspirations, which account for all his mishaps in the realm of theory and his backsliding. *What a man is, such is his philosophy*, Fichte said with much justice.

[Religion “is the opium of the people,” Marx wrote in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*. [11\*] “To abolish religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people is to demand their *real happiness*.... The criticism of religion is therefore ... the criticism of the vale of tears.” [12\*]

This kind of language could not, of course, be to the liking either of the bourgeois philistines, who stand in need of the “opium” of religion to ensure for themselves a little of *illusory happiness*, or of those far more gifted and bold ideologists of the bourgeoisie who, after shedding their own religious prejudices, yet regale the masses of the people with *illusory happiness* exclusively to protect from those masses the *real happiness* of the well-endowed classes. It goes without saying that these are gentlemen that have risen

up so violently against materialism and so loudly condemn the “dogmatism” of those revolutionaries who unmask the actual nature of their anti-materialist propaganda ...]

In an interesting booklet entitled *Reform oder Revolution*, C. von Massow, Geheimer Regierungsrath, Mitglied der internationalen Kommission für Schutzpflege u.s.w., in short, a most “*estimable*” gentleman, voices his firm conviction that “if our development proceeds in the same way as it has till now, then our Fatherland will be threatened in the future by social revolution” (*Vorwort*, S. 1). What is needed, in his opinion, to avoid that revolution is comprehensive reform (*eine Gesamtreform auf staatlichem und sozialem Gebiet*), a demand his book deals with. But his programme of comprehensive reform does not preclude a struggle against the “revolutionary forces” (*die Mächte des Umsturzes*). Before a revolutionary explosion takes place, those forces should be fought against with the *spiritual* weapon (*mit geistigen Waffen*), and in that struggle the efforts should be directed, first and foremost, *against materialism*. However, Herr von Massow thinks that the struggle against materialism will be best conducted by those opponents of the “revolutionary forces” that will cleanse themselves of the taint of materialism. “The enemy we must engage in the first place is the materialism in our own midst,” he preaches. “Social-Democracy is utterly materialistic; it denies God and eternity” (*sic*). “But who has that doctrine been borrowed from? Has it not come down from above? The vast majority of the educated people of our times have turned away from the faith of their fathers ...” “Part of the educated world are quite atheistic.” [7] And the social consequences of atheism are horrifying. “If there is neither God, life beyond the grave, nor eternity; if the soul ceases to exist together with the advent of death, then any calamity, any poverty suffered by part of mankind, which suffers while another part enjoys surfeit, becomes two or three hundred times as unjust. Why should nine-tenths of the people bear a heavy burden of life while a minority remain free of any burden?” [8]

This is a question the atheist can give no satisfactory answer to. But it is therein that the *social* danger of atheism lies; it arouses and encourages revolutionary sentiments in the toiling masses. That is why our Geheimer Regierungsrath, etc., etc., preaches to the educated bourgeoisie repentance and a struggle against materialism. Herr von Massow is an intelligent man. He is far more intelligent than all those “Marxists” who, while sincerely sympathising with the working class, no less sincerely go in for “critical” philosophy. Such people adhere to a materialist understanding of history, but they are greatly surprised when they are told of the *social*, i.e., ultimately, the *economic* causes of that negative attitude towards *materialism*, and that spread of *neo-Kantianism*, which are to be seen among the educated bourgeoisie of today.

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## V

But let us hark back to Herr Bernstein. The concluding chapter of his book is embellished with the epigraph: “*Kant wider Cant*”. In explaining the meaning of this epigraph, Herr Bernstein says that he has invoked the spirit of the Konigsberg philosopher for a struggle against the conventionality of outmoded views which are seeking to assert themselves in Social-Democracy, and present a great danger to it. “The fits of fury I have thereby evoked in Mr. P.” (Plekhanov) “have fortified me in the conviction that Social-Democracy needs a new Kant to subject the old doctrine to rigorous ethical winnowing and show wherein its ostensible materialism is the highest and therefore most easily misleading ideology, show that contempt for the ideal and elevation of the material factors to the level of omnipotent powers of development is self-deception, which has always in fact been seen as such by those who preach it” (p. 330). The reader is hard put to understand what he means by “ostensible materialism”, and “self-deception” – moreover, one that is “in fact” quite *deliberate*. The explanation is quite simple: in Herr Bernstein’s opinion, self-deception is unavoidable wherever there are people who consider the economic factors “omnipotent”, while, at the same time, they are “in fact” capable of harbouring *ideals*. This alone is sufficient to show how *close* Herr Bernstein now stands to Mr. Kareyev, and therefore how *far removed* he is from any serious criticism of Marxism. For conclusive proof of that one has only to read the pages devoted by Herr Bernstein to an assessment of the *historical* views of Marx and Engels. The reading of those pages makes one’s hair literally stand on end. For lack

of space, we shall not analyse them here, but shall refer the curious reader to what has been said about them by Karl Kautsky in his book *Bernstein und das sozial-demokratische Programm*, and by us in the *Preface* to the new edition of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. [9] [13\*] We shall only note here the following oddity, which incidentally refers, not to a philosophico-historical but to a philosophical “criticism” of Marxism. Herr Bernstein says: “In the expression ‘the materialist understanding of history’ are contained, in advance, all the misunderstandings linked in general with the concept of materialism. Philosophical or natural-historical materialism is quite deterministic, which cannot be said of the Marxist understanding of history, which does not award the economic foundation of the life of peoples any absolutely determining influence on its forms” (pp. 23–24). This is tantamount to asserting that a determinist is one that awards to the economic foundation of life an absolutely determining influence on the *forms* of life (?!). This must be the height of ignorance and ineptitude. But that is not all. Later, when Kautsky remarked in *Neue Zeit* that no scientific explanation of phenomena is possible without determinism, our “critic” hastened to declare that he had rebelled only against *materialist* determinism, which consists in an explanation of psychological phenomena by the operation of matter, while he, Herr Bernstein, also recognises the operation of another principle. Herr Bernstein has thus safely put in at the peaceful haven of *dualism*, the entrance to which bears the edifying inscription: “*Man is made up of body and soul.*” Again, this is the *Kareyev doctrine* the Russian reader is so well familiar with. But it is in poor accord even with Kantianism that Herr Bernstein wishes to “return” to. Kant asserts categorically that *alle Handlungen der vernünftigen Wesen*,

*sofern sie Erscheinungen sind, in irgend einer Erfahrung angetroffen werden, stehen unter der Naturnothwendigkeit* (all the acts of rational beings, inasmuch as they are phenomena and in one way or another are met by us in our experience, are subordinate to natural necessity) (*Prolegomena*, Paragraph 53). Should this be taken to mean that phenomena obey natural necessity? It means just that they are to be explained materialistically (*cf. Kritik der Urtheilskraft*, Paragraph 78). It appears, consequently, that Herr Bernstein has rebelled, not only against the materialists but *also against Kant*, and with the sole purpose of avoiding any *threat to the bourgeoisie's ideological interests*, i.e.. to avoid attacking bourgeois cant. *Cant wider Kant* – such is the motto Herr Bernstein should choose.

If Herr Bernstein has rejected *materialism* so as to avoid “threatening” one of the “ideological interests” of the bourgeoisie known as *religion*, his rejection of *dialectics* has resulted from his non-desire to frighten the selfsame bourgeoisie with the “*horrors of violent revolution*”. We said above that he was himself probably not unwilling to condemn the “*abstract either ... or*”, which takes no account of conditions of place and time, which is why he himself unconsciously uses the dialectical method. That is true enough, but it should now be added that he unconsciously takes up a concretely dialectical stand only in those cases and only in the measure in which dialectics is a *convenient weapon in the struggle against the imaginary radicalism of “revolutionaries” whose thinking follows the “yes is yes, no is no” formula*. These are the cases when any *philistine* turns into a *dialectician*. But that selfsame Herr Bernstein is prepared – together with all philistines the world over – to

utter any kind of balderdash against dialectics and level the most absurd accusations against it whenever he thinks it can help strengthen and develop revolutionary aspirations in the area of socialism. Marx says that in the good old times dialectics became the fashion with the German philistines when they knew it only in its mystified form and imagined that it could serve to justify their conservative aspirations, but they turned against it when they learnt its real nature and realised that it considers everything that exists in terms of its transience, that it stops at nothing and fears nothing, in short, that it is *revolutionary in its essence*. [14\*] This same attitude towards dialectics is to be seen in Herr Bernstein, all of whose psychology reveals him as an offspring of German philistinism. That is why his “criticism” has been welcomed by the German philistines with loud and long outcries of joy, and why they have numbered him among the great. Birds of a feather ...

So as not to “threaten” the bourgeoisie with the “horrors of violent revolution”, Herr Bernstein has rebelled against dialectics and risen up in arms against the *Zusammenbruchstheorie* which he himself has invented. At the same time and with the same aim in view, he is acting as a Pindar of *democracy*. “Democracy,” he says, “is, in principle, the destruction of class domination if not the actual destruction of classes themselves.” (p. 225) We are well aware of all the advantages of democracy and of all the benefits it gives the working class in its struggle for liberation. However, we do not wish to distort the truth even for the sake of democracy, in just the same way as we do not wish to indulge in unseemly exaggeration. That democracy destroys class domination is nothing more than an invention of Herr Bernstein’s. Democracy allows that domination to

exist in an area to which the notion of class, properly speaking, belongs, i.e., *the sphere of the economy*. It abolishes only the *political privileges* of the upper classes. It is for that reason that it does not destroy the *economic* supremacy of one class over another – the bourgeoisie over the proletariat – it does not eliminate either the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie or the need for the proletariat to wage that struggle employing all the means that may prove *fitting* at a given time. In reasonable terms, any man in his right mind will agree that the “horrors of violent revolution”, *taken by themselves*, contain nothing that is *desirable*, but any man who has not been blinded by anti-revolutionary trends must also acknowledge that a democratic constitution does not preclude an exacerbation of the class struggle that can make a revolutionary explosion and a revolutionary dictatorship inevitable. Herr Bernstein had no grounds to frighten revolutionaries with the consideration that class dictatorship would be a sign of a lower level of culture. The great social question of our times – that of the abolition of the economic exploitation of man by man [can be solved – in just the same way as all great social questions of former times – *only by force*. True, *force does not yet mean violence; violence is only one of the forms of the manifestation of force*. However, the *choice of the form* in which the proletariat will have to display its revolutionary strength *depends, not on its good will but on the circumstances*. That form is better which leads to victory over the enemy more speedily and assuredly. If a “*violent revolution*” has proved the most suitable mode of action in a given country and in given circumstances then that man will prove a miserable doctrinaire – if not a traitor – who will bring to bear against it principled considerations like those we meet in Herr

Bernstein's writings: "a low level of culture", "political atavism" and so on. Hand-to-hand fighting] is, if you wish, a zoological "atavism" wherever it takes place: two men locked in struggle remind one of two fighting beasts. But who, except the "Tolstoyans", will in principle condemn any resistance to evil by means of hand-to-hand fighting? And will any serious man be found who will take in earnest the arguments with the aid of which the Tolstoyans condemn violence in principle? To any thinking man it is obvious that such arguments are an unintended caricature of thinking in accordance with the "*yes is yes, and no is no*" formula so beloved of Herr Bernstein, which, as we know, is quite identical to the Hegelian "*abstract either ... or*" (violence is *either* evil *or* good). The "horrors of violent revolution" are always more or less "horrible". That is so and nobody will question it. However, Herr Bernstein has chosen a very bad way of evading those horrors: he should address himself to the bourgeoisie and show those of its elements who have not yet sunk into the morass of class selfishness that trying to slow down the socialist movement of today means committing a heinous sin against humaneness and culture. In the measure of success attending his preachment, it would weaken the resistance offered by the bourgeoisie to the proletarian movement and thereby lessen the possibility of the "horrors of violent revolution". Herr Bernstein has preferred to act differently. He has set about befogging the class consciousness of the workers by coming out with a preaching of a Marxism which he has "revised" with the special purpose of soothing the bourgeoisie. This device has proved effective in the sense that a considerable part of the educated bourgeoisie has very well realized all the *advantage to it* of the spread of a Marxism "revised" by Herr Bernstein at the expense of the old and revolutionary

theory of Marx. This part of the bourgeoisie has greeted Herr Bernstein as a kind of Messiah. However, he is dead as far as socialism is concerned, and, of course, will never rise from the dead, no matter how loud his outcries that the socialists have failed to understand him and that, in essence, he has changed very little in comparison with what he previously was. Surely, an excess of zeal that gets one nowhere!

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## VI

At every step Herr Bernstein loses his bearings in the vagueness of his ideas and is entangled in his own contradictions. Nevertheless, his arguments contain a logical nub about which all his thoughts group themselves. That nub is the *incomes doctrine*.

“It is quite wrong to think,” he says, “that present-day development shows a relative or even absolute decrease in the number of property-owners. Their number is growing, not ‘more or less’ but simply more, i.e., is growing absolutely and relatively. If the activities and prospects of Social-Democracy depended on a decrease in the number of property-owners, then it could indeed sleep soundly. But that is not the case. It is not with a decrease but with an increase in social wealth that the prospects of Social-Democracy are linked.” (p. 90)

Neither Marx, Engels nor any of their followers ever linked their hopes with a *decrease* in social wealth. In his attempts to break *such* a “link”, Herr Bernstein is simply battling against windmills. However, all Marxists have been convinced that the growth of social wealth in capitalist society goes hand in hand with the *growth of social inequality and a decline in the number of property-owners*. Had Herr Bernstein been able to prove the reverse, it would have to be acknowledged that he had dealt Marxism a mortal blow. (And then, indeed, all talk of the social revolution would be useless.) The trouble is that Herr Bernstein has proved absolutely nothing except his own lack of understanding. The arguments he adduces in defence of his bold statements boil down in practice to the thesis that moderate incomes grow more rapidly than the population does. This is an indisputable fact but it proves absolutely

nothing. *If social income grows more rapidly than the number of moderate incomes does, then the growth of that number is fully compatible with the growth of social inequality.* We have proved that in an article against Mr. P. Struve specially dealing with the question of the “dulling” of socio-economic inequality. [15\*] We shall refer the reader to that article, limiting ourselves here to some specific remarks.

In the first place, the growth in the number of moderate incomes, which is quite compatible with the growth of socioeconomic inequality, in no way testifies either to the absolute, and still less to the relative increase in the number of property-owners. *Property and income* are two quite distinct notions.

In the second place, Herr Bernstein’s references to the distribution of landed property are just as *inaccurate* as his mention of the growth in the number of moderate incomes lacks conviction. Here is one of the many examples available.

He says that the group of medium-size peasant farms in Germany grew by almost 8 per cent in the period between 1882 and 1895, while their area went up by 9 per cent (p.110). But what sense do figures on the growth in the absolute number of farms of the area of a *single* category of farms make if we are not told the *total* number of farms in the country and the *total* area under cultivation? If we take into account this circumstance, i.e., if we consider the *share* of medium-size peasant farms in the aggregate number of farms and the aggregate area, we shall find that the area occupied in Germany by farms in this category showed a quite negligible increase. In 1882 it formed 11.9 per cent of the entire land area, rising to 12.37 per cent in 1895, an increase of *less than one-half per cent*. But we say

this about the *entire* land area in Germany. As for the agricultural area proper, farms in the category mentioned accounted for 12.26 per cent in 1882, and 13.02 per cent in 1895, a growth of not more than 0.75 per cent. [10] This growth was so insignificant that the use of the word *growth* is somewhat strange.

So complex is the state of affairs in German agriculture that it cannot be discussed in terms of bare statistics alone, but calls for a consideration of the geographical features of each locality, as well as the technical and economic features of each particular category of farms, and also the *changes* in those features in the periods under review.

As for *Britain*, Herr Bernstein has forgotten to add, or does not know, that the small farmers, who have indeed increased in number in some areas, this under the influence of overseas competition, go by the name of “*British slaves*” [11], so *poor* is their economic condition.

Marx’s theory is just as little disproved by the growth in the number of such “slaves” as it would be by the increase of the sweating system [12] in any branch of the manufacturing industry.

In the East of the *United States*, Herr Bernstein says, the number of small and medium-size farms is growing. Again this is untrue. In the Eastern States the number of small farms is *falling*, and in general, according to Levasseur, a certain *trend towards concentration* is to be seen in North America. [13]

The most recent statistics also reveal a concentration of landed property in *Belgium* [14] where a *relative decrease in the number of owners of land is an established fact*.

## VII

“Herr Schulze-Gävernitz’s one-sided presentation of the history of modern British development, against which I came out very sharply in the past, has not prevented him, either in his *Zum sozialen Frieden* or in his monograph *Der Grossbetrieb – ein wirthschaftlicher Fortschritt*, from establishing facts of great importance for an understanding of the economic significance of our times,” says Herr Bernstein. “I see nothing bad in that, and willingly admit that I have noted many facts quoted by Schulze-Gävernitz as well as by other economists of the Brentano school (Herkner and Sinzheimer), facts I had not previously noticed or had underestimated. I am not even ashamed to admit that I have learnt something from J. Wolf’s book *Sozialismus und kapitalistische Gesellschaftsordnung*. Herr Plekhanov calls this an eclectic blending (of scientific socialism) with the doctrine of bourgeois economists. As though nine-tenths of the elements of scientific socialism have not been taken from the works of ‘bourgeois economists’, and as though, in general, there exists such a thing as ‘partisan science’.” (pp.306 and 307)

Strictly speaking, “*partisan science*” is impossible, but, regrettably enough, the existence is highly possible of “*scientists*” who are imbued with the spirit of parties and with class selfishness. When Marxists speak of bourgeois science with contempt, it is “*scientists*” of that brand that they have in view. It is to such “*scientists*” that the gentlemen Herr Bernstein has “learnt” so much from belong, viz. J. Wolf, Schulze-Gävernitz, and many others. Even if nine-tenths of scientific socialism has been taken from the writings of bourgeois economists, it has not been taken in the way in which Herr Bernstein has borrowed from the Brentanoists and other apologists of capitalism the material he uses to “revise” Marxism. Marx and Engels were able to take a *critical* attitude towards bourgeois scientists,

something that Herr Bernstein has been unable or unwilling to do. When he “learns” from them, he simply places himself under their influence and, without noticing the fact, adopts their apologetics. He imagines that the doctrine of the growth of moderate incomes as proof of the absolute and relative rise in the number of property-owners is a serious advance in objective science, whereas it is actually an apologetical fabrication. Were Herr Bernstein capable of scientific thinking, he would not have barked up the wrong tree, as he has done, but then he would not have written his book.

As far back as the autumn of 1898, we voiced the thought that Herr Bernstein had set about “criticising” Marx solely because of his inability to treat bourgeois apologetics critically. [15] We also noted at the time the curious fact that even Herr Bernstein’s much-talked-of expression, “*the movement is everything, the ultimate aim is nothing*”, had been borrowed by him from Schulze-Gävernitz. Incapable to advance any objections to us on fundamentals, Herr Bernstein has had recourse to abusive language, to which we find no reason to react. [16] We set high value on Herr Bernstein’s hostility to us, and are proud to have been among the first to *draw attention* to his apostasy, and *brand* it. “*It is a question of who will bury whom*” we wrote in the article in question, “*whether Bernstein will bury Social-Democracy, or Social-Democracy will bury Bernstein.*” This posing of the question seemed too harsh to many of our comrades in 1898, but that is exactly how the matter is now seen by *all* in the ranks of revolutionary Social-Democracy. The ensuing course of events fully confirmed the justice of our words. We had not the slightest wish in the past to engage in any altercation with Herr

Bernstein and we have no wish to do that today either, but we cannot withstand the temptation to note the following interesting detail.

Herr Bernstein has interpreted the remarks we directed against him in the sense that we consider the worker's condition in capitalist society "hopeless"; he has declared that he does not wish to enter into argument "with a person according to whose concepts science demands that the worker's condition should be considered hopeless in all circumstances, right up to the great upheaval" (pp.309-10). What severity of epithet! However, we come across the following passage in the severe Bernstein's book:

In the doctrine of Marx and Engels, "only the following remains unrefuted: that the productive capacity in present-day society is far greater than the actual demand for products as determined by purchasing power; that millions are living in squalid dwellings, are poorly clad and undernourished despite the abundance of means to provide them with sufficient housing, food and clothing; that overproduction is a consequence of this disproportion in various branches of industry ...; that there consequently exists considerable unfairness in providing the workers with occupations, as a result of which their conditions become most precarious, subjecting them to ever more humiliating dependence because of the excess of work at one place, and unemployment at another." (pp. 145-46)

As is her wont, Mme. Kantsel has made a poor translation of Herr Bernstein, who says that the workers *are kept* in humiliating dependence, and not that they find themselves *in ever greater dependence*, as the translator has made him say. But even in this correct translation, Herr Bernstein's idea has struck back at him. Indeed, is not the condition *hopeless*, in capitalist society, of a class which, despite the amazing growth of labour

productivity, *remains* in the economic condition and the humiliating dependence that we read of in Herr Bernstein's writings? It is patently *hopeless*, and obviously it is only *the abolition of the capitalist mode of production, the social revolution*, that can bring the proletariat out of that hopeless condition. [17] Herr Bernstein has not made a neat job of it in his new world-outlook.

Herr Bernstein asks sapiently: "Does not the vast extension of the area of the world market" (i.e., its size; we are obliged to reiterate that Mme. Kantsel has made a very poor translation of the book under review. – *G.P.*) "combined with the vast reduction of the time required for the transmission of news and the operation of transport – does it not enhance the possibility of a relaxation of depressions; and then, the steeply mounting wealth of the European industrial states, in connection with the flexibility of presentday credit and the rise of industrial cartels – has this not restricted, at least for a long time to come, the influence of local or partial depressions on the overall situation to such an extent that universal business" (i.e., industrial. – *G.P.*) "crises such as the former should be considered improbable?" (p. 126)

The events have provided the answer to this question: since the middle of last year [18] the civilized world has been experiencing a general industrial crisis, whose approach was foreseen by some bourgeois businessmen *already at the time Herr Bernstein was writing his book.*

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## VIII

In one of Shakespeare's plays, a courtier says of the demented Ophelia:

*... Speaks things in doubt,  
That carry but half sense: her speech is nothing,  
Yet the unshaped use of it doth move  
The hearers to collection ...*

The same has to be said of Herr Bernstein's book: it carries half sense; its speech is nothing, yet the unshaped use of it moves the attentive reader to collection. In all questions of theory, Herr Bernstein has shown himself to be as weak as weak can be. How has it come to pass that for many years he has played the part of one of the most outstanding theoreticians of his Party? This is a question that gives food for thought. It is no easy matter to find any satisfactory answer ...

Another and no less important matter is that only faint traces of socialism have survived in Herr Bernstein's views. In fact, he is *far closer to the petty-bourgeois adherents of "social reform" than to revolutionary Social-Democracy*. Yet he remains a "comrade", and has not been asked to leave the Party. This can be accounted for in part by the *false view regarding freedom of opinion*, now so widespread among Social-Democrats in all countries. "How can a man be expelled from the Party because of his views?" it is said. "That would mean persecuting him for heresy." People who think thus forget that *freedom of opinion* must necessarily be supplemented with freedom to draw closer together or part company, and that the latter freedom has no existence wherever some prejudice makes people march together who

would do better to part because of their difference of views. But this erroneous reasoning is only part of the explanation (why Herr Bernstein has not been expelled from the German Social-Democratic Party. The main reason is that his new views are shared by a fairly considerable number of other Social-Democrats. For reasons we cannot go into in this article, *opportunism* has won many supporters in the ranks of Social-Democracy in various countries. This spread of opportunism presents the main danger threatening it today. Social-Democrats who have remained loyal to the revolutionary spirit of their programme – and they are fortunately still in the majority almost everywhere – will be making an irreparable mistake if they do not take timely and decisive action to counter the danger.) Taken alone, Herr Bernstein, far from being formidable, is simply ridiculous and marked by a striking resemblance to the philosophizing Sancho Panza. What his theory stands for, however, is a most alarming thing as a symptom of possible decline.

[Incidentally, Herr Bernstein has written the following: “To show Mr. Plekhanov’s polemical devices in their true light, I must point out that a great if not the greater part of Russian Social-Democrats now active in Russia have decisively adopted a viewpoint close to mine, and that in that sense some of my ‘empty’ articles have been translated into Russian and brought out in separate editions.” [19] This is followed by the malicious remark that such a thing can scarcely fill us with joy. Leaving aside both the question of our personal sentiments and that of how our polemical devices can be characterized by the fact of Social-Democrats active in Russia drawing closer to Herr Bernstein – if that were true – we shall note that he is evidently referring to the so-called “economic” trend in Russian Social-

Democracy. [19\*] It is common knowledge that this trend, which met with some temporary success in Russia, has now been overcome by our fellow-thinkers, who see in Herr Bernstein nothing more than a *renegade*. But it is not yet generally known that there has been a Russian Social-Democratic publication (issued abroad) which has failed to notice the existence of the “economic” trend, and has therefore denied it. Its editors must surely be people of keen vision. [20\*]]

This wretched translation of Herr Bernstein’s wretched little book has appeared in two “legal” editions, with a third one in the offing. There is nothing surprising about that. *Any* “criticism” of Marxism and *any* parody of it – if only imbued with the *bourgeois* spirit – is sure to be to the liking of that section of our legal Marxists which is itself a *bourgeois parody of Marxism*.

August 1901.

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## Footnotes

1. [These words are in English in the original.]
2. **G.W.F. Hegels Werke**, Bd. IV, S. 150–51.
3. **Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie**, Erster Theil, **Hegels Werke**, Bd. III, S. 34–35.
4. Cf. **Die Ethik von Spinoza**, neu übersetzt von J. Stern, II. Th., S. 77 und 80.
5. In his book he says incidentally that for the expression “return to Kant” he has now substituted the expression “Let us return to Lange”. But that does not change anything.
6. Even the ancients realised that herein lay one of the great services rendered to culture by materialism. Lucretius expressed this awareness excellently in his extolment of Epicurus. “When the life of man lay ... grovelling upon the earth crushed by the weight of religion which showed her face from the realms of heaven, lowering upon mortals with dreadful mien, ’twas a man of Greece who dared first to raise his mortal eyes to meet her, and first to stand forth to meet her: him neither the stories of the gods nor thunderbolts checked, nor the sky with its revengeful roar ...”
7. **op. cit.**, S. 222.
8. **op. cit.**, S. 222–23.
9. A remark *en passant*: Herr Bernstein does not approve of our expression: the *monist* explanation of history. With him, the word *monistisch* proves synonymous with *simplistisch*. To avoid entering into lengthy explanations of why a “*monist*” explanation of history is essential, we shall say, in the words of Newton: *causas rerum naturalium non plures admitti debere, quam quae et verae sint et earum Phenomenis explicandis sufficient.* [One should not admit more causes of natural phenomena than those that are true and sufficient for their explanation.] Herr Bernstein does not understand that, while the development of social – and ultimately of

economic – relations is not the radical cause of the development of the so-called *spiritual* factor, the latter develops *out of itself*, this *self-development of the spiritual factor* being nothing more than a variety of the “*self-development of ideas*” our “critic” has warned his readers against as one of the most dangerous baits in Hegelian dialectics.

10. See *Die Landwirthschaft im Deutschen Reich*. Nach der landwirthschaftlichen Betriebszahlung vom 14. Juni 1895, **Statistik des Deutschen Reiches**. Neue Folge, Band 112, S. 11.

11. See **Final Report of H.M. Commissioners appointed to inquire into the subject of agricultural depression**, London 1879, p.30. [The two words in quotes are in English in the original.]

12. [These two words are in English in the original.]

13. **L’agriculture aux Etats-Unis**, Paris et Nancy 1894, pp. 61–62. The latest North American census showed that concentration is manifesting itself in that country in agriculture as well.

14. See the book by Vandervelde, **La propriété foncière en Belgique**, as well as our note on it in **Zarya**, Issue I.

15. In the article *Wofür sollen wir ihm dankbar sein*, **Sächsische Arbeiter-Zeitung**, Nos. 253–255. We have not yet been able to understand, incidentally, why, at the Stuttgart Parteitag, Kantsky had to express thanks to Bmistein. Kautsky’s book **Bernstein und das sozial-demokratische Programm** has fully borne out our opinion that there is nothing to thank him for.

16. Our opponent’s abusive language has gone hand in hand with dishonest methods of debate. For instance, Herr Bernstein is out to prove that it is impossible as yet to abolish classes, with which purpose he quotes Engels as having allegedly said that the abolition of classes will be possible “only at a certain and very high stage, relatively to our times, in the development of the productive forces” (pp. 325–26). What emerges is that, according to Engels, the level we have reached in the development of the productive forces is still insufficient for the abolition of capitalism. In actual fact, Engels

says quite the reverse: “*Sie*” (die Abschaffung der Klassen) “hat also zur Voraussetzung einen Höhegrad der Entwicklung der Produktion, auf dem Aneignung der Produktionsmittel und Produkte ... durch eine besondere Gesellschaftsklasse nicht nur überflüssig, sondern auch ökonomisch, politisch und intellektuell ein Hindernis der Entwicklung geworden ist. **Dieser Punkt ist erreicht...**” (emphasis is ours) (**Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft**, dritte Auflage, S. 304, XXV. [16\*]) [It (the abolition of classes) therefore presupposes a level of development of production at which the appropriation of the means of production and of the products ... by a particular social class has become, not merely superfluous but also – economically, politically and intellectually – an obstacle to development. *That stage has been attained...*] Herr Bernstein is surely trying too hard to avoid frightening the bourgeoisie.

17. Marx would have considered the worker’s condition in capitalist society “*hopeless*” even if a considerable improvement in that condition were possible. “But just as little as better clothing, food and treatment, and a larger peculium, do away with the exploitation of the slave,” he says, “so little do they set aside that of the wage-worker.” (**Capital**, I, St. Petersburg, p. 584 [Buss, ed.] [17\*]) Herr Bernstein will himself understand that the condition of the slave remains “*hopeless*”, in the Marxist sense, *until slavery is abolished*. We shall note, incidentally, that we have never used the word “*hopeless*”, which has merely been *ascribed* to us by Herr Bernstein. Our view concerning the position of the wage-worker in capitalist society was expressed and substantiated by us in our second article against Mr. P. Struve. [18\*]

18. Written in 1901.

19. This passage is omitted in Mme. Kantsel’s translation. It is to be found in the footnote on page 112 of the Russian translation of Herr Bernstein’s book, which was published in London.

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## Notes

*Cant Against Kant* was written by Plekhanov in reply to Bernstein's pamphlet *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozial-Demokratie* (*The Prerequisites of Socialism and the Tasks of the Social-Democracy*) which appeared in 1901 in a second Russian edition under the title of *Historical Materialism* in the journal of the Russian Social-Democrats *Zarya* (*The Dawn*) No. 2–3, which was published abroad. The *Neue Zeit*, as well as the organ of the French Socialist Party *Mouvement Socialiste* refused to publish it.

In the epigraph to the last chapter of his book *Historical Materialism, Kant Against Cant* Bernstein explained the word Cant as follows: “Cant’ is an English word which came into use in the sixteenth century to denote the dismal chanting common with the Puritans. In its more general meaning it denotes the way of expression either wrong, unthinking or deliberately used erroneously.” The reference in Bernstein’s epigraph is: the contraposition of Kantianism to allegedly dogmatic and hypocritical Marxism. Plekhanov has changed the word order in Bernstein’s phrase to make the meaning: hypocrisy against Kant.

1\*. From N. Nekrasov’s poem *In the Village*.

2\*. From G. Burger’s poem *Lenore*.

3\*. K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works* in three volumes, Vol. 1, Moscow 1973, p. 137.

4\*. The reference is to Engels’s statement against the “young” in the German Social-Democracy (see Note 144).

5\*. Mephistopheles’s words from Goethe’s *Faust*.

6\*. *Jourdain* – a character in Moliere’s comedy *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*.

7\*. Plekhanov is referring to Bernstein’s article *Dialektik und Entwicklung* (*Dialectics and Development*) published in *Neue Zeit*,

Nos. 37–38 for 1899, in reply to Kautsky's article *Bernstein und Dialektik* which appeared in No. 28 of the same journal.

8\*. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, Moscow 1976, p. 179

9\*. The reference is to Plekhanov's article *Bernstein and Materialism*.

10\*. The reference is to the article *Bernstein and Materialism* published in *Neue Zeit*, No. 44 for 1898; it was a reply to Bernstein's article *Das realistische und das ideologische Moment des Sozialismus* mentioned in the quotation.

11\*. *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* was edited by Karl Marx and Arnold Ruge, and published in German in Paris. One issue was put out in February 1844.

12\*. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, Moscow 1975, pp. 175–76.

13\*. See Plekhanov's work, *The Initial Phases of the Theory of the Class Struggle* (pp. 427–73 of this volume).

14\*. K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, Moscow 1974, p. 29.

15\*. See Plekhanov's second article against Struve published in this volume where he argues against the vulgar evolutionist assertions of the latter about the blunting of contradictions between labour and capital in bourgeois society.

16\*. F. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, Moscow 1975, p. 323.

17\*. K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, Moscow 1974, p. 579.

18\*. See pp. 513–66 in this volume.

19\*. *Economic trend (economists)* – an opportunist trend in the Russian Social-Democratic Movement at the turn of the century; adherents of Bernsteinism. Economists limited the tasks of the working class to economic struggle for higher wages, better working conditions, etc., asserting that political struggle is the liberal bourgeoisie's affair.

20\*. The reference is to the journal *Rabocheye Dyelo (Workers' Cause)*, organ of the Russian economists which was published in Geneva from 1899 to 1902.