KAUTSKY VERSUS LENIN AND TROTSKY BY PHIL SHARPE

INTRODUCTION

There has been a neglected polemic involving Kautsky, Lenin, and Trotsky, that has concerned issues of democracy, revolutionary strategy, and the character of socialism. This discussion has been forgotten despite the fact that it concerns crucially important issues of contemporary relevance when we discuss the feasibility and possibility of developing democratic socialism. Indeed, it could be argued that this controversy is of more importance today when the question of the relationship of democracy and socialism seems to be increasingly problematical because of the apparent lack of popularity of the latter perspective. In the inter-war period Lenin and Trotsky could argue that the only principled alternative to inter-imperialist war was the struggle for international revolution, and bourgeois democracy was nothing more than the justification of this situation of terrible conflict. Furthermore, the socialist parties that supported the reformist approach of change, via the role of bourgeois democracy, had all capitulated to the interests of imperialism. In contrast, the Russian revolution of early 1917 had created institutions of direct democracy, the Soviets, which represented the potential for the political legitimisation of the proletarian revolution. Furthermore, the Provisional government refused to call elections to a Constituent Assembly which may have represented a different form of democratic credibility. Thus the revolutionary party, the Bolshevik's, were able to unite popular democracy and principled Marxism in terms of the call for 'All Power to the Soviets'. On this basis, insurrection was carried out in October 1917. Kautsky's conception of the utilisation of bourgeois democracy in order to generate a Parliamentary majority for socialism seemed to have been proved both ineffective and lacking in credibility. However, the dissolving of the Constituent Assembly, after the holding of free elections, raised questions about the relationship of democracy to the revolutionary process. Indeed, it could be argued that Soviet democracy promoted the development of one party rule. This meant Soviet democracy was defunct by the middle of 1918. The very problematical character of the revolutionary process led to the political power of a vanguard elite, and in the West reformism was unwilling to challenge the economic domination of capital.

In this situation the discussion initiated by Kautsky about democracy versus dictatorship became increasingly relevant. Lenin and Trotsky were put on the defensive, and were only able to convincingly argue that the situation of civil war meant the norms of democracy had to be compromised by the onset of one party rule. They could also argue that only the Communist International was being developed on a principled perspective of world revolution. In 'Left-wing Communism an Infantile Disorder,' Lenin also argued that Communists were not against participation in bourgeois parliaments if it promoted the struggle for socialism. (1) Hence, it was being suggested that Communists could have a principled involvement with the institutions of representative democracy in a manner that did not undermine the aims of the class struggle. In contrast, the parties of the Second International elevated the 'national interest', or the standpoint of imperialism, above the requirements of genuine popular democracy and socialism. Kautsky failed to acknowledge this opportunism because he rejected this revolutionary perspective. Hence his arguments about the democratic character of socialism were ignored. It is true that Kautsky's ideas seemed dogmatic in the period of the intensification of the class struggle of the 1930's. This situation seemed to indicate that what was urgently required was a revolutionary strategy that could promote the capacity of the working class of Germany, France and Spain to strive for political power. But the very development of Stalinism increasingly promoted questions about the relationship of democracy to socialism. The repressive single party state seemed to suggest that this situation could not represent genuine socialism. Kautsky's questions about the importance of democracy versus dictatorship continued to undermine the boast that socialism was being built in a single country.

In the West Kautsky's approach was developed by a few individuals like John Strachey in his work: 'Contemporary Capitalism'. (2) He argued that the institutions of democracy could be utilised in order to advance the possibility of socialism. However, the recent period seems to have expressed a happy marriage between the role of representative democracy and the interests of capitalism. Consequently, Kautsky's conception of the possible relationship between bourgeois democracy and socialism seems to have been undermined, but also the revolutionary alternative of promoting popular democracy has been discredited. The situation is one in which a passive electorate, under the influence of bourgeois ideology, seems generally content to vote for establishment politics in many advanced capitalist countries, Greece is different for exceptional reasons. In this depressing situation the traditional polemic between dictatorship versus democracy, and representative democracy versus popular democracy, is an argument that seems futile. Instead we should be trying to reconcile the views of Kautsky and the Bolsheviks in order to re-discover how democracy, in its many forms, can advance the cause of socialism.

In Britain a unique opportunity presents itself with the acute political crisis of the Conservative party regarding the EU. Generally, bourgeois ideology is based on the unity of nationalism and political economy. This unity has been undermined by the divisions over Europe. Nationalism opposes the rival claim of economics. The Labour Movement has the chance to realise the political initiative by advocating its rival vision for Europe, and to make convincing arguments for socialism. This will involve developing and elaborating a contemporary version of the relationship of democracy to socialism. In this context we can learn from the Kautsky, Lenin and Trotsky debate. The opportunity exists for us to uphold the importance of participatory democracy without rejecting the significance of representative democracy. We should discuss how it is possible to win elections. What should be the immediate programme of a left wing Labour government? The point is that it is dogmatic to believe that what is called for is a repeat of the October revolution of 1917. We live in a society based on the traditional role of representative democracy and the historic institution of Parliament. Hence to call for the abolition of Parliament would be a massive error. But this does not mean we should reject the importance of workplace councils. Instead we should reflect on how these apparently competing forms of democracy can be reconciled in the interests of socialism. This process does not mean that we compromise on the principles of class struggle, but instead we should try to connect the perspective of class struggle with the character of advanced capitalism.

Implicitly Kautsky is right about one thing, which he outlined in an arrogant manner. People who have lived in a bourgeois democratic society will not accept the erosion of democratic principles in the name of worthy objectives like socialism. Instead we have no alternative than to try and reconcile democracy and socialism. Political regimes of coercion, elitism and compulsion will not be accepted as being an alternative to liberal capitalism. Instead we have to extend and not undermine the role of democracy in the name of the revolution. One party rule may have been temporarily acceptable for the period of civil war during the history of Soviet Russia, but it will not be acceptable for societies based on the importance of liberal capitalism. We have to base ourselves on the achievements of capitalism and not undermine them in the name of the revolution. In this context, Lenin and Trotsky teach us how to recognise the importance of class struggle and its obligations, but possibly Kautsky is of more relevance for the era of globalisation. The point is that is to be hoped that the horrors of inter-imperialist war are never repeated, and therefore revolutionary perspectives are based on different criteria. Indeed, it could be argued that peace, democracy and socialism will be the major inter-connected aims of the contemporary revolutionary process. We don't throw out Lenin and Trotsky with the bathwater, but we remember to add the neglected soap of Kautsky. The point is that in a subversive manner, advanced capitalism means that socialism is no longer a utopian dream, and the institutions of democracy suggest that what is possible is a truly credible democratic socialism. In this context, we should also recognise that the major opponent is bourgeois ideology and our central task is constructing a principled and credible alternative.

THE PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION AND THE RENEGADE KAUTSKY

Kautsky begins his work: 'The Dictatorship of the Proletariat' with the understanding that the revolutionary process of transition to socialism should express the principles of democracy rather than dictatorship.(3) The interesting implicit assumption is that it is possible to carry out the overthrow of capitalism in a manner that undermines the principles of democracy. He is not denying that a vanguard elite will be able to provide leadership to the working class and results in revolution being carried out. But his argument is that this development will not promote the possibility to realise socialism which requires the importance of democracy and the popular participation of working people. In other words he accepts that a ruthless elite party like the Bolsheviks can carry out the act of insurrection and the overthrow of the feeble Provisional government. But their Blanquism means that they are not equipped to facilitate the process of the realisation of socialism which requires the unity of democracy and the role of the working class in the generation of the prospects for the transformation of capitalist society.

His standpoint is based on the view that the development of the class struggle - in order to end the exploitation of capitalism - and the role of democracy are inter-connected. The view that socialism can be realised without the importance of democracy is considered a wrong view: “Socialism as a means to the emancipation of the proletariat, without democracy, is unthinkable.”(4) Hence this standpoint also implies that working people will be the major social force generating the demise of exploitation, and therefore advancing the aim of socialism, because they represent the most dynamic expression of the role of democracy. Thus socialism is not simply the objective of a nationalised and planned economy, but rather these aspects can only be developed in a principled manner by the democratic involvement of the people in the economic structures and the political process. It is argued that the ruling class will undermine democratic structures if the possibility for the realisation of the political power of the working class becomes credible. But the response of the proletariat should not be to undermine the importance of democracy in relation to the struggle for political power. Instead it should defend democracy in order to enhance the ability to be successful in the revolutionary process: “But if the proletariat in a democratic state grows until it is numerous and strong enough to conquer political power by making use of the liberties which exist, then it would be a task of great difficulty for the capitalist dictatorship to manipulate the force necessary for the suppression of democracy.”(5)

Kautsky is assuming that the long establishment of democratic rights and institutions in the advanced capitalist countries will enable the class struggle to be conducted by the utilisation of democratic methods. This implies that the process of change will occur in terms of the attainment of a Parliamentary majority by the socialist party, and so the aspects of the revolutionary process will not involve violent change and insurrection: “In a democratic republic, where the people’s rights have been firmly established for decades, perhaps centuries, rights which the people conquered by revolution, and maintained or extended, thus compelling the respect of the ruling classes for the masses, in such a community the forms of transition would certainly be different from the those in a state where a military despotism has been accustomed to rule by force, and hold the masses of the people in check.”(6) Kautsky does not predict categorically that violence will not be part of the revolutionary process in countries with a tradition of democracy. But he does imply that the historical significance of democracy will mean that it is possible and realistic to assume that the overthrow of capitalism will have the form of democratic change.

The problem is that his perspective underestimates the importance of the inter-imperialist war which has meant that bourgeois democracy has become discredited in order to justify national aggression and the development of an authoritarian state. In this context, Kautsky's approach of waiting for the end of the war seems passive and unable to provide revolutionary leadership. But, in contrast, the Russian working class opposed Tsarism, established their own institutions, the Soviets, and the dynamic of this situation was the establishment of Soviet power in October 1917. The perspective of Kautsky, that the role of democracy is integral to the establishment of socialism, is not discredited by these events, but neither does it provide a strategy by which the class struggle can be advanced in terms similar to the Russian events. Lenin dismisses the significance of Kautsky's approach in the following manner: “All he wants is that the honey-mouthed, petty-bourgeois intellectuals and philistines in night caps should first – before the masses begin to move, before they start a furious battle with the exploiters, and certainly without civil war – draw up a moderate and precise set of rules for the development of revolution.”(7) This may seem to be a valid criticism given Kautsky's apparent passivity and inaction when compared to the role of the Soviets under Bolshevik leadership. But the tactical incompetence of Kautsky does not mean that his standpoint of connecting democracy to the aim of socialism is unprincipled or flawed. Indeed it could be argued that this principle was upheld in relation to the role of the Soviets in the Russian revolution of 1917. Lenin accepts the relationship of democracy to the revolutionary process when he comments: “Naturally, therefore, the Soviets, as the organ of the struggle of the oppressed people, reflected and expressed the moods and changes of opinions of those people ever so much more quickly, fully and faithfully than any other institution (that incidentally is one of the reasons why Soviet democracy is the highest type of democracy)” (8)

Lenin is arguing that the Soviet, which have been formed in the course of the development of the class struggle, and as an expression of the views of working people, will be a more accurate and dynamic democratic organisation than any bourgeois Parliamentary institution. Thus it is being suggested that Kautsky does not accept this view because he assumes that traditional democratic institutions will also be receptive to the possibility of revolutionary change. This means he does not accept that this standpoint has been superseded by the role of the Soviets, which are able to express the class viewpoint of proletarian democracy. Hence his dogmatism means that he cannot comprehend the actual relationship of democracy to the requirements of class struggle. However, he could argue that in the countries of entrenched Parliamentary institutions, the role of the Soviets is yet to be established. Consequently, it is not surprising that he implies that Soviets have been formed in Russia which lacks an established democratic tradition. This means it is a form of democracy that is not based on the open rivalry of parties, universal suffrage and general elections. Instead the role of the Soviets is compatible with a situation of restricted democracy. In contrary, Kautsky suggests that what is required is the following: “The proletarian class struggle, as a struggle of the masses, presupposes democracy. If not absolute and pure democracy, yet so much of democracy as is necessary to organise masses, and give them uniform enlightenment. This cannot be done adequately by secret methods. A few fly sheets cannot be a substitute for an extensive daily press. Masses cannot be organised secretly, and, above all, a secret organisation cannot be a democratic one. It always leads to the dictatorship of a single man, or a small knot of leaders. The ordinary members can only become instruments carrying out orders. Such a method may be rendered necessary for an oppressed class in the absence of democracy, but it would not promote the self-government and independence of the masses. Rather would it further the Messiah consciousness of their leaders, and their dictatorial habits.”(9)

In other words the role of the Soviets is not necessarily criticised, but what is problematical is their manipulation by conspiratorial party organisations like the Bolsheviks. In this context the Soviets have not proved sufficiently democratic to oppose the dictatorial aims of the Bolsheviks to establish their single party rule. The assumption is that this situation could not be easily realised in countries with more established democratic traditions. To Lenin, this view is spurious because it glosses over the fact that the Soviets have acquired a character that is in accordance with the aims of the revolutionary party. The Soviets accept that is their obligation and duty to struggle for state power: “And in time of revolution, when political life reaches boiling point, an organisation like the Soviets, which embraces all the workers in all branches of industry, all the soldiers, and all the working and poorest sections of the rural population – such an organisation of its own accord, with the development of the struggle, by the simple “logic” of attack and defence, comes inevitably to pose the question point-blank.”(10) The Soviets have not been manipulated by the revolutionary party, but instead they accept that defeat will occur if they refuse the task of realising political power. In this manner, the dynamics of the class struggle realise proletarian democracy. In contrast, the approach of Kautsky is criticised as being an expression of indecision, passivity and expressing illusions in the progressive nature of bourgeois democracy. His answer to these criticisms is based on the relationship of historical materialism to strategy.

The possibility for socialism is based upon the generation of social forces that are created by the development of capitalism, or large scale industry. This situation is connected to the development of the working class which has the maturity and will to organise these productive forces in a different socialist manner. The class struggle indicates that the working class has the political capacity to utilise democracy in order to promote the aim of socialism. But in countries lacking these objective and subjective conditions, revolutionary tendencies are created which preach liberation of the people by an elite. In relation to the advanced capitalist countries the crucial question about transition to socialism is based on the following question: “Is the proletariat strong and intelligent enough to take in hand the regulation of society, that is, does it possess the power and capacity to transfer democracy from politics to economics?”(11) Lenin would argue that this question has begun to be answered in relation to the Russian revolution, which is the beginning of world revolution: “Not only the general European, but the world proletarian revolution is maturing before the eyes of all, and it has been assisted, accelerated and supported by the victory of the proletariat in Russia. All this is not enough for the complete victory of socialism, you say? Of course, it is not enough. Our country alone cannot do more. But this one country – thanks to the Soviet government, has done so much that even if the Soviet government in Russia were to be crushed by world imperialism.....it would still be found that Bolshevik tactics had brought enormous benefit to socialism and have assisted the growth of the invincible world revolution.”(12)

In other words, Kautsky's supposedly immaculate conception of historical materialism, and its understanding of the possibilities of proletarian revolution and the transition to socialism, is not connected to the real events of the inter-imperialist war and its generation of the potential for world revolution. Hence the 1917 revolution is not an expression of the conspiracy of an elite, but is instead the culmination of the dynamics of the role of the Soviet and its expression of the logic of the class struggle both nationally and internationally. In contrast, Kautsky's application of historical materialism seems to be a schema that lacks strategic validity. It could be argued in general terms that socialism requires democracy, but what is the relationship of this understanding to the actual class struggle? Indeed, Kautsky seems to justify passivity, whilst the Bolsheviks uphold the development of Soviet power and the creation of a proletarian state. The Bolsheviks would argue that their national tactics are an expression of the aim of world revolution. In this context, Soviet Russia is not isolated, and instead aims to build socialism in connection to the success of international revolution. Thus Russia is in this sense not immature in relation to the task of socialist construction. In contrast, Kautsky lacks a conception of world revolution, and instead his strategy is based on a few dogmatic truths based on the character of capitalism before imperialism. The only aspect of his approach that seems to have continued validity is that socialism can only be developed on the basis of democracy. However, even this standpoint can be justified in order to uphold dogmatic truths. He suggests that if the proletariat is not the majority of the people, and so cannot uphold its political power in democratic terms, it will not be possible to build socialism: “The most effective weapon of the proletariat is its numerical strength. It cannot emancipate itself until it has become the largest class of the population, and until capitalist society is so far developed that the small peasants and the lower middle classes no longer outweigh the proletariat.”(13) If this viewpoint is strictly understood it would suggest that socialism was impossible in a society with a sizeable peasantry or middle class. This is a dogmatic and pessimistic standpoint. What is being suggested is that the working class cannot establish alliances with these other social forces in order to establish a democratic basis for socialism.

Lenin effectively refutes this view of Kautsky and contends that the Soviet revolution was based on an alliance with the whole of the peasantry which carried out the bourgeois revolution in terms of land reform. However, he then suggests that this process was extended in terms of the application of the proletarian revolution to the countryside: “The Soviet republic sends into the rural districts detachments of armed workers, primarily the more advanced, from the capitals. These workers carry socialism into the countryside, win over the poor, organise and enlighten them, and help them to suppress the resistance of the bourgeoisie.”(14) This idea that proletarian revolution has been carried out in the countryside is propaganda. Instead the peasantry are forced to provide food for the cities and Red Army. Ironically, Kautsky is vindicated when he suggests that coercion cannot advance socialism and instead what is required is the application of democratic methods. However, he is wrong to suggest that the development of the worker-peasant alliance can only compromise the realisation of the aims of socialism. War communism was a mistake that did undermine the attempt to reconcile the majority of the peasants with the objectives of socialism, but the introduction of the New Economic Policy did re-create the worker-peasant alliance, and therefore re-established economic and political connections between the peasantry and the working class. In terms of the implementation of the correct economic policy, the democratic basis of support for socialism was established. In contrast, Kautsky was wrong to imply that the peasants would only support capitalism. The New Economic Policy outlined how capitalist economic activity within the peasantry could be connected to the aim of building socialism. Kautsky's formal logic could not grasp the dialectics of the worker-peasant alliance.

Kautsky's criticisms of the October revolution are stronger when it comes to the question of democratic rights of minorities. He makes the important point that the electoral system should be based on universal suffrage in order not to discriminate against minorities. (He is referring to the exclusion of the bourgeoisie from the Soviet electoral system) The democratic system should be based on the rule of the majority, but this should not mean discrimination against the minority. The system of political discrimination in electoral rules can only favour the creation of rule by a bureaucracy. Instead of seeking to ensure the eternal rule of one party because of discriminatory electoral rules that persecute minorities, it would be better to understand that parties rule of behalf of classes, and this means that minority parties should have the right to become a majority: “Government by parties in a democracy change more rapidly than the rule of classes. Under these circumstances, no party is capable of retaining power, and must count on the possibility of being in a minority, but by virtue of the nature of the state no party need remain in a minority for ever.”(15) In contrast, the Bolsheviks attempt to repudiate the dynamics of the relations between majorities and minorities by introducing arbitrary measures to deny the vote to particular categories of people. This development can only undermine the democratic possibilities of the revolution.

To Lenin the view of Kautsky is an expression of liberalism. He is explicit that in a proletarian state the minority must submit to the majority: “Hence, as long as there are exploiters who rule the majority, the exploited, the democratic state must inevitably be a democracy for the exploiters. A state of the exploited must fundamentally differ from such a state; it must be a democracy for the exploited, and a means of suppressing the exploiters; and the suppression of a class means inequality for that class, its exclusion from “democracy”. (16) Lenin is arguing that Kautsky does not understand the class dynamics of the relationship between the majority and minority. On the basis of this critique he justifies the denial of voting rights to the minority class of former exploiters. What he does not seem to understand is that this exclusion may uphold the domination of the proletarian state but what has occurred is a violation of the relationship between democracy and socialism. Democratic principles must be based on the rights of minorities, and so the exercise of discrimination against the minority only undermines the democratic credentials of any regime. The actual strengthening of the proletarian regime would be based on the explicit acceptance of universal suffrage. This would enable majority rule to be based on the toleration of minorities. Lenin would argue that this is a luxury that cannot be afforded because the former ruling class is organising civil war. He argues: “This historical truth is that in every profound revolution, the prolonged, stubborn and desperate resistance of the exploiters, who for a number of years retain important practical advantages over the exploited, is the rule. Never – except in the sentimental fantasies of the sentimental fool Kautsky – will the exploiters submit to the decisions of the exploited majority without trying to make use of their advantages in a last desperate battle, or series of battles.”(17) But the point is that Kautsky's approach (if not his actual conclusions) does not deny the necessity of organised self-defence against violent counter-revolution. However, this defensive action does not justify the manipulation of the electoral system in order to deny a vote for minorities. Furthermore, the continued application of democratic principles is a strong argument in favour of socialism despite the threat of counter-revolution. It indicates that the old ruling class are against democracy because of their violent resistance. However, if the revolutionary regime undermines the rights of universal suffrage this makes it seem that the old ruling class can justify their opposition in formal democratic terms. But primarily the end of rights for minorities can erode the very political rights of the working class which may be divided in party-political terms. The only beneficiaries of the end of universal suffrage are the party aspiring to absolute rule. Lenin suggests the revolutionary process cannot advance without infringing on the electoral rights of the exploiting minority. But this is not proved, except in the exceptional circumstances of civil war. Instead Kautsky seems to be right to contend that denying democratic rights for minorities can only undermine the relationship of democracy to the class struggle and the aim of socialism.

Thus Kautsky's conclusion seems to be more principled than the reasoning of Lenin: “The deeper the roots which democracy has struck, and the longer it has lasted and influenced political customs,....... the more sucessfully it can oppose the pretensions of any party which seeks to remain in power at all costs.”(18) Hence the implicit view is that the Bolsheviks are utilising the civil war situation in order to promote the development of one party rule. This is an unfair assumption given the Bolsheviks did not start the civil war, which was the outcome of resistance by the former ruling class. However, he seems right to imply that the Bolsheviks do not have consistent democratic principles, and ultimately have the aim of one party rule. He contends that Russia has lacked democratic institutions which could influence the class struggle and ensure that the process of revolution conforms to the principles of the generation of popular support for change. In contrast the struggle against despotism involved only a small section of the working class led by an elite party. The political situation under despotism implied concentration on conspiracy and less concern with the democratic development of the class struggle: “When the people are roused to action under a democracy, there is less danger than under a despotism that they have been prematurely provoked, or will waste their energy in futile efforts. When victory is achieved, it will not be lost, but successfully maintained. And that is better in the end than the mere nervous excitement of a fresh revolutionary drama.”(19)

The argument is that democratic methods will provide a better understanding of the balance of class forces and the possibilities for socialism. Lenin would argue that the role of the Soviets ensured the democratic character of the revolutionary process in Russia, and the result has been the Soviets have replaced the previous role of the bureaucratic state apparatus. Consequently: “This fact alone is enough for all the oppressed classes to recognise that Soviet power, i.e., the present form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, is a million times more democratic than the most democratic bourgeois republic.”(20) Lenin seems right to question Kautsky's implicit view that the October revolution was based on a coup which rejected the importance of democracy and so could not result in the formation of a democratic state that is able to promote socialism. He also seems to have a credible argument when he defines Kautsky's conception of the democratic transition to socialism as an accommodation of bourgeois democracy and rejection of the importance of revolution: “Kautsky either rejects the assumption of state power by the working class altogether, or he concedes that the working class may take over the old, bourgeois state machine. But he will by no means concede that it must break it up, smash it, and replace it by new proletarian machine. Whichever way Kautsky's arguments are “interpreted”, or “explained”, his rupture with Marxism and his desertion to the bourgeoisie is obvious.”(21) This view is fair given Kautsky's vague strategy of the democratic transition to socialism, which implies that it is realised by the utilisation of Parliament. But this criticism is also unfair because serious arguments can be made for the democratic process of revolutionary change, which is Kautsky's intention, even if he does not successfully outline his approach. He elaborates his standpoint in the following manner: “Democracy is the essential basis for building up a socialist system of production. Only under the influence of democracy does the proletariat attain that maturity which it needs to bring about socialism, and democracy supplies the surest means for testing its maturity. Between these two stages, the preparation for socialism and its realisation, which both require democracy, there is the transition state when the proletariat has conquered political power, but has not yet brought about socialism in an economic sense.”(22)

This could be considered a vague approach which is inferior to the precise strategy of Soviet power promoted by the revolutionary process in Russia. But it could also be argued that this perspective is flexible and so can be applied both to the situation in Russia and the different context of the advanced democracies of the West. The point is the development and utilisation of democracy is crucial if the working class is to obtain political power and so be able to create the conditions for the realisation of socialism. In its most flexible form, Kautsky's formulation does not deny the possibility of both insurrection, and change via the role of Parliamentary institutions. What is indispensable to all circumstances is that democracy is crucial if the conditions for socialism are to be advanced. Hence he is not utilising the importance of democracy in order to guarantee the peaceful transition to socialism. He comments: “Of course, democracy does not guarantee a peaceful transition. But this is certainly not possible without democracy.”(23) His most emphatic view is that socialism is not possible if oligarchical or elite rule is established. The utilisation of anti-democratic methods will not bring about socialism, and instead can only result in bureaucratic distortions. In this context, he argues that Marx's conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat was considered to be compatible with democracy. The Paris Commune, which was considered to be the model of the future society, was based on the role of democracy: “It was, however, at the same time not the suspension of democracy, but was founded on its most through-going use, on the basis of universal suffrage. The power of the government was subjected to universal suffrage.”(24) Consequently, the society envisaged by Marx did not imply the dictatorship of a single party, or individual, instead the formula dictatorship of the proletariat defined the class character of the Paris Commune. Its actual political structures were based on the flourishing of democracy and the role of the multi-party system, and this situation was admired by Marx and Engels. In this context, the role of coercion is reduced to a minimum, or to defend democracy against the utilisation of force.

In other words the question of similarity between the Soviet state and the Paris Commune is denied by Kautsky because he would contend that the former is based on restrictions of democracy and instead the primary feature is the expressed by dictatorship. Lenin replies that the dictatorship of the proletariat, represented by the Soviet republic, means the extension of proletarian democracy: “Proletarian democracy, of which Soviet government is one of the forms, has brought about a development and expansion of democracy unprecedented in the world, for the vast majority of the population, for the exploited and working people.”(25) Lenin is arguing that Kautsky cannot recognise the significance of proletarian democracy, which he crudely defines as the exercise of dictatorship. Hence the suggestion is that Kautsky can only consider bourgeois democracy as the expression of all aspects of democracy. However, Lenin's standpoint is compromised by the fact that Soviet democracy is upheld in terms of the rule of a single party. Lenin does not tackle this issue satisfactorily because he considers that restrictions upon formal democracy, such as banning parties and restrictions on the suffrage are an integral aspect of proletarian democracy and the political role of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin insists that Kautsky does not understand the political situation in Russia and instead wants to impose immaculate rules of democracy. Kautsky defends his conception of the democratic advance of socialism without regard for the actual conditions of the class struggle in Russia, which influence the character of proletarian democracy, the role of the Soviets, and the necessity to oppose the violent opposition of the former exploiters.

Kautsky's definition of the character of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the democratic role of the Paris Commune seems undeniable. However, Lenin would add that what is capable of bringing about a state that is reminiscent of the Paris Commune is the revolutionary struggle for Soviet power. The Soviets are the contemporary version of the Paris Commune and the alternative to the bourgeois democratic state: “But the state of the Paris Commune type, the Soviet state, openly and frankly tells the whole people the truth and declares that it is the dictatorship of the proletariat and the poor peasants; and by this truth it wins over the scores and scores of millions of new citizens who are kept down in any democratic republic, but who are drawn by the Soviets into political life, into democracy, into the administration of the state.”(26) The implication is that by effectively denying the revolutionary role of the Soviets, Kautsky cannot contemplate the similarity of Soviet power with the Paris Commune. However, Kautsky would argue that these differences are based on the restrictions placed on democracy in the former regime in contrast to the expansion of democracy in the latter. Indeed he suggests that the Soviet power represents the dictatorship of the proletariat and sections of the peasantry over another section of the proletariat. This situation is a recipe for repression as the basis of political rule. (27)

Kautsky's approach equates the problem of developing democracy with the question of the material conditions of Russia. He outlines in rigid historical materialist terms how a country with a low level of the productive forces is likely to result in the creation of a minority dictatorship. But this essentially principled criticism is connected to rejection of the pro-peasant policy of the Bolsheviks which is considered to be the basis for justifying the denial of democracy. Kautsky ignores the fact that only the Bolsheviks carried out an agrarian policy of the completion of the bourgeois democratic revolution in terms of the alliance of the Soviets and all of the peasants in favour of land reform, which then became the basis for advance towards socialism. Lenin is right to suggest that Kautsky is ambiguous about this process because he suggests it is not possible to go beyond capitalism. He outlines how Kautsky in a sceptical manner contends that: “Thus, Kautsky charges the Bolsheviks, the party of the proletariat with having surrendered the dictatorship, the work of achieving socialism, to the petty-bourgeois peasants. Excellent, Mr Kautsky! But what, in your enlightened opinion, should have been the attitude of the proletarian party towards the peasants?”(28)

But Kautsky argues in reply that the Soviet republic has acted to uphold dictatorship against democracy, contrary to the actions of the Paris Commune. This situation must express: “The subversion of democracy by dictatorship can therefore only be a matter for consideration in exceptional circumstances, when an extraordinary combination of favourable circumstances enables a proletarian party to take to itself political power, while the majority of people are either not on its side, or are even against it.”(29) This explains why the Soviet government cannot utilise universal suffrage in order to generate popular support for the regime, and the implicit assumption is that the role of democracy is undermined in order to maintain the power of the revolutionary regime. However, this understanding is based on a certain rigid application of historical materialism which implies that socialism is not possible in a country with the low level of development of the productive forces, and the working class is in a minority. Hence it cannot obtain a majority for socialism. However, Lenin explained that the Soviet regime obtained the support of the majority of the peasants for land reform, and this development meant the opposition of the reactionary classes lacked mass support. Hence, he maintains the political conditions were established for the process of transition to socialism in agriculture: “But, let it be said in parenthesis, even if this had not been the case, it would not have proved that the proletariat should not have taken power, for it is the proletariat alone that has really carried the bourgeois-democratic revolution to its conclusion, it is the proletariat alone that has done something really important to bring nearer the world proletarian revolution, and the proletariat alone that has created the Soviet state, which after the Paris Commune, is the second step towards the socialist state!”(30) Thus Lenin is implying that Kautsky is utilising a rigid and inflexible conception of democracy – the relationship of the majority to the minority – in order to deny the popular support and principled character of Soviet power. Kautsky is suggesting that the Bolshevik regime represents the domination of the minority over the majority. Lenin replies that this standpoint upholds a caricatured approach that tries to deny the importance of the activity and perspectives of the Soviet state, which includes the popular participation of the people in the administration of society, the carrying out of the bourgeois democratic revolution in agriculture, and the intransigent advocacy of world revolution. Indeed, Lenin would argue that Kautsky has nothing constructive to say on these issues because he dogmatically contends the Soviet regime cannot unite democracy with socialist objectives.

However, Kautsky seems to be right to suggest that the dictatorship of a minority, or the state bureaucracy, cannot realise the unity of democracy and socialism. Also civil war is not an integral part of the revolutionary process, and instead can only result in political polarisation, plus the economic and social dislocation of society which undermines the development of the productive forces necessary for socialism. (31) He argues that civil war and violence has been the traits of bourgeois revolutions, but it should be possible to avoid this development when the proletariat is the majority of the nation. He contends: “The more democracy rules, not merely formally, but actually anchored in the strength of the working classes, the greater is the likelihood that the political revolution will be a peaceful one. Contrariwise, the more the system which has prevailed has been without the support of the majority of the people, and has represented a minority which kept control by military force, the greater is the likelihood that the political revolution will take the form of civil war.”(32) Kautsky is making a powerful point. The revolutionary process is more likely to be successful and advance the conditions for socialism if it peaceful. This possibility is greater when the working class is a majority of the population, and so can promote change that unites the importance of peace and democracy. Hence violent change is more likely to occur when the political system is not democratic, the productive forces are limited, and so the working class is a minority of the population, which means revolution takes the form of a civil war. Lenin should have admitted the wisdom of Kautsky's view. Instead he understandably outlines how Kautsky was not equal to the tasks generated by the onset of inter-imperialist war and the capitulation of Social Democracy to national chauvinism. The working class is breaking with the old organisations, but Kautsky is vacillating because of his centrist approach: “Has a revolutionary situation come or not? Kautsky proved unable to put this question either. The economic facts provide an answer: the famine and ruin created everywhere by the war imply a revolutionary situation. The political facts also provide an answer: ever since 1915 a splitting process has been evident in all countries within the old and decayed socialist parties, a process of departure of the mass of the proletariat from the social chauvinist leaders to the left, to revolutionary ideas and sentiments, to revolutionary leaders.”(33)

It is true that Kautsky was unable to provide principled revolutionary leadership in the inter-war years. But this does not necessarily undermine the validity of his ideas about the process of transition from capitalism to socialism. He is making a strong point when he contends that the revolutionary process will be most successful when it combines a commitment to peace and democracy with socialist objectives. However, he is wrong to also maintain that this implies that proletarian revolution cannot occur effectively in less advanced capitalist countries. Instead he should be prepared to be more sympathetic about the Russian revolution whilst still upholding his strategic commitments. Instead he contrasts his strategy with its apparent violations by the Bolsheviks. In other words Kautsky should try harder to reconcile his strategy with the experience of the Russian revolution. This does not mean that he should compromise his approach, or dilute his conception of the relationship of democracy to socialism. Instead he would be more flexible and less dogmatic if he recognised that the forces of reaction are responsible for the civil war, and so ensuring that the Russian revolution is not a peaceful process. But his view that the Bolshevik are constructing a single party regime still has plausibility, and his emphasis on the relationship of socialism to the flourishing of the multi-party system is valid.

The problem is that Kautsky's criticisms of the October revolution are absolute, in that this very event is defined as being the action of an elite that can only result in important political problems concerning democratic legitimacy. He implies that he supports the Mensheviks who aim to establish a progressive bourgeois regime in order to promote the productive forces and the political conditions for socialism. Hence the assumption is that proletarian revolution in these circumstances can only be premature. He also argues that the Mensheviks had a more principled peace policy in terms of support for a general peace without annexations, but the limitations of the Provisional Government meant that this aim could not be advanced. Hence the Bolsheviks were able to increase their popularity by advocating peace on the basis of the promotion of the European revolution. This was the basis of the Bolsheviks conception of the realisation of socialism: “The revolution which would bring about socialism in Europe would also be the means of removing obstacles to the carrying through of socialism in Russia which are created by the economic backwardness of that country.”(34) However Kautsky contends that European revolution did not occur because of different conditions compared to those of Russia, and this has led to important problems, such as the inability to establish a regime of material wellbeing because of economic dislocation. The result was the imposition of dictatorship, and the election results to the Constituent Assembly indicated the Bolsheviks lacked popular support and so they dissolved that institution.

Kautsky is not denying that the Bolsheviks approach would have had validity if European revolution had occurred, and indeed he does not deny that the conditions for this development are maturing. Lenin argues that Kautsky cannot support any version of internationalist strategy because he effectively defends the Mensheviks who acted to uphold the Provisional government, and so promoted the continuation of imperialist war. The call for peace was a fiction in these circumstances. The only form of internationalism that was possible in the years of imperialist war was to oppose it with the aim of world proletarian revolution. In contrast, Kautsky has no effective strategy for challenging imperialism and advancing the cause of the world revolution, instead he seeks to discredit the Bolsheviks with the claim that their perspective of imminent international revolution did not occur. But the Bolshevik never had this approach, instead they suggested that a revolutionary situation was developing because of European war, and so the conditions were maturing for an intensification of the international class struggle. Indeed, this development has occurred in Germany and other countries despite Kautsky deliberately ignoring this situation. Instead in a fictional manner he suggests the Bolsheviks blame the international proletariat for a failure to develop world revolution. Lenin replies to this criticism: “The Bolshevik tactics were correct; they were the only internationalist tactics because they were based, not on the cowardly fear of world revolution...These tactics were the only internationalist tactics, because they did their utmost possible in one country for the development, support and awakening of the revolution in all countries.”(35) Lenin is suggesting that Kautsky has not effectively broken with all those counter-revolutionary forces that oppose the development of world revolution. Thus his argument would seem to be more principled and intransigent than the alternative of Kautsky. Indeed, Kautsky makes no detailed reference to the importance of the imperialist war and its strategic implications. In contrast, the Bolsheviks have developed an understanding of the revolutionary possibilities of European war, and the Russian revolution is a practical confirmation of this perspective. Kautsky seems to be denying the connection of Russia to the possibility for international revolution. This is because international revolution was never imminent, and instead this standpoint was a subjective error of Bolshevism. Lenin rejects this view as a caricature of the Bolsheviks tactics, and he maintains that Kautsky is ignoring the actual development of revolution in many countries.

On the question of the Constituent Assembly Lenin argues that Kautsky upholds the slander that he contends the Bolsheviks only decided to dissolve it when they were found to be in a minority. Lenin rejects this view and instead argues that the approach of the Bolsheviks was based on the perspective that Soviet democracy was superior to an institution of bourgeois democracy: “My theses say clearly and repeatedly that the interests of the revolution are higher than the formal rights of the Constituent Assembly....The formal democratic point of view is precisely the point of view of the bourgeois democrat who refuses to admit that the interests of the proletariat and of the proletarian class struggle are supreme.”(36) Lenin maintains that Kautsky could not recognise the class differences between the Soviets and Constituent Assembly, and that an unresolvable difference had developed between them. The only solution was the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly: “So, even the external history of the Soviets shows that the Constituent Assembly was a reactionary body and that its dispersal was inevitable. But Kautsky sticks firmly to his “slogan”: let “pure democracy” prevail though the revolution perishes and the bourgeois triumph over the proletariat!”(37) This is the pertinent point. The Soviets and Constituent Assembly could not overcome the tensions created by the effective development of rival sovereignty, and this impasse was resolved by the Soviets dissolving the Constituent Assembly in the name of proletarian democracy. This situation was possibly unavoidable, and Kautsky has a point when he suggests that the result of this action was to consolidate the character of the regime as dictatorship. However, as Lenin remarked, Kautsky ignored the significance of the class content of the tensions between the Soviets and the Constituent Assembly. He does not recognise the Soviet as institutions of proletarian democracy, and so considers them inferior to the Constituent Assembly. Hence he does not consider the Constituent Assembly as a bastion of counter-revolution. Thus Lenin seems to be right to suggest that Kautsky's approach lacks the aspect of class analysis.

Indeed, Kautsky definitely considers the Soviets, which he admits are important militant organisations for mass struggle, are inferior in democratic terms when compared to the Constituent Assembly and other democratic organs: “The Bolshevists who, together with the left-wing Social Revolutionaries, obtained a majority in the Russian workers councils after the November revolution of 1917, after the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, proceeded to make an organ of government of the Soviets, which hitherto had been the fighting organ of the working class. They did away with the democratic institutions which had been conquered by the Russian people in the March revolution”(38) This view underestimates the fact that since 1905 the Soviets had been both an expression of the democratic views of the working class, or expression of mass struggle, but also they have striven to realise an alternative form of government. The 1905 Soviet had acted to call a general strike which would have the aim of forming a workers government. In this context, the Soviet under Menshevik domination in 1917 had betrayed its revolutionary credentials by accommodating to the political supremacy of the bourgeois Provisional government. The Bolsheviks restored the revolutionary character of the Soviets by establishing popular support for the demand 'All Power to the Soviets'. Hence Lenin considered the Soviets to be a potential form of the Commune state, and so would encourage the administration of society by working people. In contrast, Kautsky upheld the view that Soviets can express the will and activity of the workers in struggle against capital, but cannot become state organisations: “This is where Kautsky's complete rupture with both with Marxism and socialism becomes obvious. Actually it is desertion to the camp of the bourgeoisie who are prepared to concede everything except the transformation of the organisations of the class which they oppress into state organisations.”(39) Lenin is contending that to Kautsky the very organisations that are the primary basis of class struggle cannot become the basis of the proletarian state. Instead the assumption is that the institutions of bourgeois democracy are sufficient for the promotion of socialism. Kautsky considers bourgeois institutions as sufficient for the capacity to generate socialism, and this means he rejects the revolutionary view that the Soviets represent the smashing of the bourgeois state and its replacement with a commune state. In other words, Kautsky reject the revolutionary logic that class struggle within capitalism, and its institutional expression in the form of Soviets, can also express the character of the state after the realisation of the overthrow of the system. Instead Kautsky reduces the revolutionary process to the role of reform because he considers that change at the level of bourgeois democratic institutions is sufficient to bring about socialism. In this sense, the role of the Soviets becomes superfluous as an expression of the character of post-capitalist society, and instead the process of the reconciliation of democracy and socialism makes them irrelevant. Lenin seems right to suggest that this approach denies the ability of Soviets to realise their potential in terms of the formation of the Commune state. Thus, it would seem that to Kautsky socialism can only be based on the legitimacy provided by institutions of bourgeois democracy, and therefore the Soviets have only a limited role as organs of the mass mobilisation of the workers to oppose capitalism. This standpoint denies the revolutionary potential of the Soviets to become organs of democracy within the proletarian state.

Lenin makes a powerful point: “Now we must look forward instead of backward – to replacing the bourgeois democracy by proletarian democracy. And while the preparatory work for the proletarian revolution, the formation and training of the proletarian army were possible (and necessary) within the framework of the bourgeois democratic state, now that we have reached the stage of “decisive battles”, to confine the proletariat to this framework means betraying the cause of the proletariat, means becoming a renegade.”(40) The point being made is that the formation and activity of the Soviets express the dynamics of class struggle and the possibility to overcome the limitations of bourgeois democracy, and therefore establishes the Commune state on the basis of proletarian democracy. Kautsky cannot recognise this dynamic because he can only consider the transition to socialism on the basis of the institutions of bourgeois democracy. Any other standpoint is a justification of the rejection of the connection of democracy to the aim of socialism. But, both these positions of Kautsky and Lenin are one-sided. Lenin is rejecting the merit of bourgeois democracy because of its class limitations, and so the only principled strategy of realising the political power of the working class is considered to be establishing the domination of Soviet democracy. Hence he seems to reject any role for the institutions of bourgeois democracy in order to provide additional legitimation for the role of the revolutionary process. In contrast, Kautsky seem to emphasise the importance of bourgeois democracy for providing the validity of the creation of the political power of the forces of socialism. Hence he denies the importance of the Soviets for being part of the claims for the democratic character of working class power. This is a dogmatic view that denies the connection of the Soviets within capitalism to the role of post-revolutionary political institutions. But Lenin also denies the possible revolutionary importance of bourgeois democracy for equally dogmatic reasons.

However, Lenin seems to be correct to suggest that Kautsky's position is inconsistent because he implies that the class struggle in Europe is developing, and yet he is indifferent to the possible revolutionary role of Soviets in relation to the task of forming a Commune state: “To say to the Soviets, fight, but don't take state power into your hands, don't become state organisations – is tantamount to preaching class collaboration and “social peace” between the proletariat and bourgeoisie. It is ridiculous even to think that such a position in the midst of fierce struggle could lead to anything other than ignominious failure. But it is Kautsky's everlasting fate to sit between two schools. He pretends to disagree with the opportunists in theory, but in practice he agrees with them on everything essential (i.e. on everything pertaining to revolution).”(41) Lenin is suggesting that Kautsky has a mythical and illusory revolutionary conception of the democratic process of transition to socialism, but in practice he opposes the genuine revolutionary approach based on the promotion of the role of the Soviets and their ability to form a commune state. Thus, in practice, Kautsky capitulates to the reformist forces that adapt to bourgeois democracy, but in theory he cannot accept this criticism. However, what if there is a democratic conception to socialism that Kautsky helped to develop? His standpoint is based on the creation of majority support for a socialist party within Parliament. This strategy is undermined by reformist practice, but it remains a strategy that has possibilities. Consequently, Kautsky's standpoint is not a conscious accommodation to reformism but is instead an attempt to develop a revolutionary approach that is able to overcome the limitations of the Bolshevik standpoint. Hence the problem of minority dictatorship is replaced by majority rule that corresponds to democratic criteria. However, Lenin seems to be right to suggest that Kautsky's approach lacks strategic credibility because his conception of the democratic transition to socialism ignores the role of the Soviets. Consequently, the crucial question becomes: is the unity of Lenin and Kautsky's approach unworkable or credible?

But, even if we can raise serious questions about Kautsky's conception of the democratic process of transition to socialism, which ignores the political role of the Soviets, he seems to have a strong argument in regards to the limitations of the implementation of Soviet democracy. He outlines how the former capitalists are denied a vote, which means that all who do not engage in productive work are denied a vote. This situation means it is impossible to assess the possible popularity of capitalism. Furthermore, other parties like the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries are not allowed the right to engage in Soviet elections. This act of political repression is justified by the Constitutional pretext that political rights are withdrawn from all that act to the detriment of the revolution. Kautsky concludes: “So within the proletariat itself the circle of those who participate in political rights, upon who the Bolshevist regime rest, becomes even smaller. Starting out with the idea of establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat the Bolshevist regime was bound to become the dictatorship of a party within the proletariat. Yet it might be for a long time the dictatorship of the majority of the proletariat over the minority. Today even that has become doubtful.”(42) He concludes that the result of this situation has been civil war because the exercise of Soviet democracy has been restrictive and biased. Kautsky's objection to Soviet democracy becomes credible because he believes it is no substitute for an electoral system based on universal suffrage and a multi-party system. Instead Soviet democracy has led to the rule of a single party, and minority dictatorship.

Lenin replies that because the class character of the Soviet state is proletarian, this means that proletarian democracy is more genuine and authentic than bourgeois democracy and its defence of capital. However, the conclusion that he makes from this understanding is that the situation of democracy for the exploited means political suppression of the exploiters. Hence Kautsky's call for formal equality in the voting system represents denial of the political logic of this new relationship between the former exploiters and exploited. It is important to understand that the former exploiters retain political influence from the past; they may influence the peasantry and sections of the workers, and ultimately engage in armed resistance against the rule of the working class. This situation results in the vacillation of the middle peasants, and of the petty-bourgeois parties like the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. Hence, in this situation of acute class struggle, and the ambiguous role of many uncertain allies, the only option is to develop a system of democracy that favours the continuation of the dictatorship of the proletariat: “In these circumstances, in an epoch of desperately acute war, when history presents the question of whether age old and thousand year privileges are to be or not to be – at such times to talk about majority and minority, about pure democracy, about dictatorship being unnecessary and about equality between the exploiter and the exploited! What infinite stupidity and abysmal philistinism are needed for this!”(43) Lenin is making the point that the actual intensification of the class struggle means that the possibility of an immaculate democratic process of transition to socialism is not possible. Instead the character of democracy has to be modified and connected to the necessity to oppose the possibility of counter-revolution. This means there has to be bias in the political system, such as the restriction of voting rights for various categories of people, in order to ensure the employers do not utilise the democratic system to further their aim of counter-revolution. However, the restrictions on the franchise may not be an aspect of all proletarian revolutions, but what is crucial is the suppression of the ability of the employers to organise and oppose the Soviet state.

But the point being made by Kautsky is that these repressive measures may not promote the aims of the realisation of socialism because this objective relies on the consistent application of the methods of democracy. In this context restrictions on the voting rights do not thwart the prospect of counter-revolution, but they may result in undermining the very ability of sections of the working class and the peasantry to vote for the parties they want to. For example, people cannot vote freely for the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries. Hence, once the process of universal suffrage is tampered with, the ruling party can modify the voting system to its advantage. This actually means depriving sections of the working class of the right to vote. In this manner the conception of proletarian democracy becomes a fiction and instead the situation can only justify the dictatorship of the minority over the majority. Lenin replies that the situation in which the bourgeoisie were denied the right to vote for the Soviets was because of civil war and their violent opposition to the hegemony of the Soviet state. In contrast, the workers and peasants have the vote. Lenin is eloquent about Kautsky's hypocritical concern for the political rights of the bourgeoisie, and he remarks: “The fact that after a year's “experience” the Soviets have deprived the exploiters of the franchise shows that the Soviets are real organisations of the oppressed and not of social-imperialists and social-pacifists who have sold themselves to the bourgeoisie.”(44)

This view ignores the essential point made by Kautsky, which is that the restrictions on the voting rights of the bourgeoisie only provide the precedent for the electoral rights of the working class and peasantry to be undermined. This situation occurs when a working class party like the Mensheviks are banned, or the Social Revolutionaries, are repressed, which denies the right to electoral choice to the peasants. The point is that the undermining of the multi-party system, and tampering with universal suffrage, means that democracy is restricted, and the ability to promote socialism is opposed by the effective justification of a dictatorship of a single party. Lenin cannot answer this point, and instead has to resort to rhetoric about the merits of proletarian democracy. He does not seem aware that only the uncompromising advance of genuine democracy can express the true content of proletarian democracy. Instead in the name of proletarian democracy he is justifying measures that result in the formation of a single party regime. This development cannot be of benefit to the class struggle, and the promotion of socialism. Lenin is right to argue that the Soviet regime has the right to suppress the resistance of the employers in the civil war, but this should not also justify the compromising of the principles of democracy, such as the dilution of voting rights and the repression of the multi-party system.

Kautsky is arguing that socialism can be realised more effectively, and in a principled manner, if it is based on the political consent of the majority, and is not a result of the imposition of the methods of the dictatorship of a minority. In contrast, the imposition of dictatorship results in the polarisation of the class struggle that leads to civil war. Furthermore, the state bureaucracy is unable to administer the economy efficiently and the result is the collapse of the level of the productive forces, and the inability to create the material conditions for socialism. This situation of economic crisis and political polarisation indicates that there is no alternative to the role of democracy for the promotion of socialism. But the problem is that this standpoint is not meant to explain the situation in Russia in terms of the flaws of dictatorship. Instead it is meant to suggest that the very potential for socialism in Russia is not present. In historical materialist terms, Kautsky denies the validity and authenticity of the Russian revolution: “The various states of the world are at very different stages of economic and political development. The more a state is capitalistic on the one hand and democratic on the other, the nearer it is to socialism. The more its capitalist industry is developed, the higher is its productive power, the greater its riches, the more socially organised its labour, the more numerous its proletariat; and the more democratic a state is, the better trained and organised is its proletariat. Democracy may sometimes repress its revolutionary thought, but it is the indispensable means for the proletariat to attain that ripeness which it needs for the conquest of political power, and the bringing about of the social revolution. In no country is the conflict between the proletariat and ruling class absent, but the more a country is progressive in capitalism and democracy, the greater is the prospect of the proletariat, in such a conflict, of not merely gaining a passing victory, but also of maintaining it.”(44) Thus he concludes that Russia lacks the economic and political conditions for socialism and instead is carrying out what is effectively a bourgeois revolution. Thus the small scale character of production in agriculture is testimony to the lack of material conditions for socialism which requires large scale industry and agriculture.

This historical materialist rejection of the proletarian character of the October revolution is very dogmatic. This revolution was the culmination of class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat which led to Soviet power. Opposition of the reactionary classes is based on the fact that what had occurred was a proletarian revolution. The Russian revolution did not correspond to the orthodox conception of historical materialism, but that does not make it somehow inauthentic, or bound to fail. Instead it was the outcome of an acute crisis of capitalism, which took the form of inter-imperialist war, and so generated mass unrest in Russia. Furthermore, the proletarian revolution occurred because of the very limitations of the bourgeois Provisional government. This government failed to realise peace, did not carry out land reform, and was unable to convene the Constituent Assembly. The forces of bourgeois democracy were shown in this concrete situation to have failed, whilst the proletariat with revolutionary leadership represented the promise of historical advance. The perspective of the Russian revolution, connected to the development of the international revolution, seemed to be a realistic strategy, and was not based on illusory premises and a voluntarist conception of the maturity of Russia for socialism. Instead the strategy of the Revolutionary party was that the generation of the material conditions for socialism in Russia would be developed by the success of world revolution. At the level of the international class struggle the premises of historical materialism would not be defied, but instead they would be upheld in terms of the actual development of economic and political events.

The point is that in terms of formal theoretical logic, Kautsky's approach could be said to be correct and principled. He outlined cogent reasons why socialism is best advanced by the relationship of capitalist development to democracy. The working class learns how to administer a socialist society within developed capitalism. But reality itself had produced reasons why it was dogmatic to stick rigidly to this conception of historical materialism, which in its original form had become a schema. Instead it was necessary to understand why proletarian revolution had occurred in what could be said to be a backward society. In Russia the very contradictions of global capitalism were expressed in an acute form. The possibility of proletarian revolution in Russia was the beginning of a possible world revolution because of the contradictions of the character of capitalism as imperialism. However, this does not mean that the Bolsheviks were right to justify the erosion of democratic rights in the name of the proletarian revolution. The formation of a minority dictatorship indicated that Kautsky's views about the integral relationship of democracy to socialism were perceptive and relevant. But this situation did not mean that a bourgeois revolution was being carried out. Instead the unfavourable material conditions meant a bureaucratic workers state was being created. This situation was based on the very undermining of the relationship between democracy and socialism. It is true that the process of land reform was carried out which amounted to the completion of bourgeois democratic revolution. But the Bolsheviks, misguidedly, tried to advance the objective of socialism by the coercive means of war communism. The retreat to the New Economic Policy did not mean the re-assertion of bourgeois revolution; rather it represented an economic retreat by a bureaucratically distorted workers state. The NEP, if it lasted longer, could have promoted the aims of socialism via the construction of the worker-peasant alliance. Also the very success of world revolution could have resolved the problem of the minority dictatorship being formed in Russia. In this sense, the Russian revolution, despite its contradictions, was an expression of the possibility to realise world socialism.

Kautsky applies his historical materialist understanding that building socialism is difficult in a country of the low development of the productive forces to the issue of agriculture. He outlines how the process of land reform under the Soviet regime has led to the consolidation of private capitalist farming in the form of the generation of many small scale plots. The peasantry is united in attempting to sell its surplus produce for the highest price, and in this manner comes into contradiction with the proletariat who want to buy agricultural produce at the lowest price. The Soviet regime attempts to resolve this contradiction by using the coercive policy of war communism, or obtaining surplus grain by using the methods of requisition. However, this will not resolve the basic problem which is that of small scale agriculture. Only the modernisation of agriculture, which is based on the introduction of sophisticated agricultural techniques and machinery, can resolve the problem of supplying cheap food for the cities. But this possibility requires the development of capitalist industry. The Bolshevik methods of dictatorship will not resolve the agricultural problem by means of dictatorship, and instead its policies will be influenced by the over-whelming social significance of the peasantry. This implies the development of private production in the countryside, and its influence will be extended to industry: “We have already shown how overwhelming is the preponderance of the peasants. Their co-operation with the proletariat has made possible the victory of the revolution, but it also testifies to the middle class character of the revolution. The more it is completed and strengthened in this sense, that is the more secure the newly-created peasant property is made, the more the ground will be prepared, on the one side for capitalist agriculture, and on the other for a growing opposition between the peasant and proletariat. The economic tendencies working in this direction are all-powerful in present day Russia, and the most forcible dictatorship would not avail to counteract them. Rather will it strengthen them in the shape of a dictatorship of the peasants.”(45)

In the long term, Kautsky's position is incorrect in terms of underestimating the ability of the bureaucratic dictatorship under Stalin to impose its priorities onto agriculture despite the opposition of the peasantry. The forces of small scale peasant farming were not stronger than the repressive methods of the state to impose its priorities in terms of forced collectivisation. This was a type of bureaucratic modernisation of agriculture which Kautsky could not have envisaged. However, in the short-term he was perceptive to suggest that the peasants had the upper hand in relation to economic policy, and this situation could not be disguised by the imposition of war communism. But his rigid historical materialism meant he could not propose a flexible policy that could resolve the tension between city and countryside. He did not advocate a type of New Economic Policy which would increase trading because this would only reinforce the dictatorship of the peasants! He was against the application of coercion by the state, but did not have an alternative apart from modernisation of agriculture which he implied was unrealistic within Russian society! Hence his approach was based on an impasse, and so the Bolshevik alternative of war communism seemed to be a superior pragmatic approach, and suggested that Kautsky's indecision was being replaced by a definite policy to advance the role of socialism within agriculture. Only with the introduction of the New Economic Policy was it admitted that War Communism was a failure, and that the market could be combined with the aim of advancing socialism. In 1918 both Lenin and Kautsky were united in the view that peasant agriculture was capitalist and so opposed to the interests of socialism. This standpoint led to policy failures by both of them.

Lenin is right to suggest that the dictatorship of the peasants is unlikely in a situation in which the Soviet regime is carrying out a policy of forcible grain requisitioning. But Lenin indulges in propaganda when he suggests that this process represents the advance of socialism into agriculture: “Having completed the bourgeois democratic revolution in alliance with the peasants as a whole, the Russian proletariat finally passed on to the socialist revolution when he succeeded in splitting the rural population, in winning over the rural proletarians and semi-proletarians, and in uniting them against the kulaks and the bourgeoisie, including the peasant bourgeoisie.”(47) Despite indicating Kautsky's inconsistencies on issues like land reform and the nationalisation of the land, Lenin is unable to convincingly outline how the situation is being prepared for the advance of socialism within agriculture. Indeed, he could not carry out this theoretical task because war communism only alienated the peasants from the objective of socialism. Only with the introduction of the New Economic Policy could Lenin convincingly answer Kautsky and indicate that socialism within agriculture was being advanced in terms of the re-construction of the worker-peasant alliance on the basis of the role of incentives and trade.

In regards to the issue of industry, Kautsky denies the possibility to create a socialist economy, because firstly, the control of the factories by the workers will not realise socialism which requires social ownership and planning, and secondly, the peasantry have the economic power to dictate the imperatives of industry. In relation to the first point he contends: “Social Democracy does not demand the transference of factories to their workers, but strives for social production, that is, production for the needs of society in place of commodity production, and this is only possible through the social ownership of the means of production.”(48) He argues this standpoint in terms of the elitist view that the working class in Russia is of peasant origin, and so lacks the cultural and trained capacity to organise industry. Indeed he suggests that this problem means that industry is effectively administered by specialists. However, his major point is that he does not define socialism in terms of the promotion of industrial democracy. Instead he argues that only with social ownership can society plan production in order to realise the needs of society. Only under the organisation of the state can it be possible to promote the welfare of society. The assumption is that this situation will require a high level of development of the productive forces under capitalism. The methods of dictatorship do not establish the efficient administration of industry that is characteristic of socialism. But, the major reason that defines the capitalist character of industry, despite nationalisation, is that it has to accept the logic of the peasant economy, the sale of agricultural products at a high price, and the sale of industrial goods at a low price. This means low wages for workers, and antagonism between them and the peasantry. This situation could be resolved by the development of a dictator who favoured the peasantry. But the most progressive resolution of the various contradictions would be the development of democracy that would enable the proletariat to establish an alternative to the situation of dictatorship: “Today we rest our expectations that the Russian proletariat will not be cheated of all the fruit of the Revolution only on the supposition that the dictatorship will not succeed in stifling democratic consciousness in the Russian people, and that, after all the errors and confusions of the civil war, democracy will finally be triumphant.”(49)

Kautsky's approach is ambiguous about whether the situation can mature in favour of the process of transition to socialism. Instead he is emphasising that the Russian working class does not have the capacity to administer the economy, and the nationalised industries are not responsive to the imperatives of planning as a result of social ownership. Instead the priorities of industry are imposed by the peasantry who are able to establish the conditions of trade between the factories and the countryside. This means the logic of the nationalised economy is based on the interests of the private economy of the peasants. He argues that the most progressive outcome of the situation is the development of democracy, but we do not know what that means in more precise terms. Is he suggesting that the working class can influence the development of the economy and so create a situation in which capitalism acts in the interests of the development of socialism, or is he merely referring to the political system and establishing a long-term majority for socialism in those terms? But, regardless of how we interpret Kautsky, he does seem to be suggesting that the Bolsheviks cannot oppose the development of the economy in capitalist terms. His historical materialist approach, which implies socialism is not possible in a situation of the low level of the productive forces, seems to imply a fatalistic approach; the Bolsheviks can do nothing to influence the development of a capitalist economy within Russia. In this context, his suggestion that democracy represents the most progressive outcome, is very vague and ambiguous. It is also interesting that his conception of the importance of democracy does not include the role of industry. Instead he is in favour of the state presiding over industry within socialism. But how can we have a politically democratic system, and yet industry is administered in hierarchical terms? This is a contradiction that Kautsky does not resolve.

But Lenin in his reply does not take the opportunity to refute Kautsky and to outline an argument that would imply it is possible to begin to create socialism in a country with the low level of productive forces. He can no longer uphold industrial democracy because this development is being replaced with one man management of industries. Instead all that seems credible within his approach is that the implementation of war communism implies that the character of the peasant economy is being connected to the objectives of the Soviet state. Lenin never replied to the major challenge of Kautsky, which was to connect the role of the Soviet economy with an alternative conception of historical materialism. Hence the view that the Bolsheviks could not undermine the development of capitalism, and the economic supremacy of the peasantry, was not adequately answered. Nor does Lenin bother to explain how the civil war must have influenced the economic policy of the Soviet state. Instead he is content to indicate how Kautsky is a hostile critic of the October revolution. This means aspects of Kautsky's criticism were not adequately answered. However, Lenin could outline how Kautsky was not able to rise to the challenge of the tasks of world revolution. This was the strong point of Lenin's critique of Kautsky.

Kautsky concludes his work with the view that the Bolsheviks established their rule on the basis of the worker-peasant alliance, and with the ideology that dictatorship can promote socialism. This led to support for their efforts and attempts at emulation in international terms. They justify their actions in terms of the role of the dictatorship of the proletariat. But the restrictions on democracy that result from this perspective means that it should not be copied in international terms, and instead socialist parties should remain truthful to the view that only democracy will bring socialism. Indeed the achievements of the Russian revolution will be only upheld if dictatorship is replaced with democracy: “The dictatorship does not reveal itself as a resource of the Socialist party to secure itself in the sovereignty which has been gained in opposition to the majority of the people, but only as a means of grappling with tasks which are beyond its strength, and the solution of which exhausts and wears it; in doing which it only too easily compromises the ideas of socialism itself, the progress of which it impedes rather than assists.”(50)

Kautsky's first meaningful reference to the achievement of the Russian revolution is not explained, and instead in negative terms the importance of dictatorship is outlined in terms of the problematical tasks which a socialist government could not resolve, or believed it could not solve, in a democratic manner. The fact that the Bolsheviks are unable to tackle economic and political tasks explains its resort to dictatorship, which disguises failure by means of force. Lenin would suggest in reply that Kautsky does not understand the significance of civil war and the necessity to repress resistance with the methods of coercion. In this context, Kautsky's emphasis on democracy represents a formula without practical substance; he does not understand the character of the class struggle that is occurring in Russia. However, even if we have some sympathy with Lenin's criticism of Kautsky we can also accept that Kautsky has outlined an understanding of the importance of the relationship of democracy to socialism that has not been addressed. He has outlined powerfully how the methods of dictatorship cannot replace the significance of democracy. Hence, will Trotsky be able to reply to this argument in a manner that is more effectively than the approach of Lenin? This is one of the major subjects of the next section.

TROTSKY VERSUS KAUTSKY

Kautsky introduces his new polemical work: “Terrorism and Communism” with a historical analysis of the development of the bourgeois revolution, which involved features like the role of an absolute monarch, the discontent of the artisans of the town and peasantry, and the role of the bourgeoisie and intellectuals.(50) He outlines how the French revolution came to be based on the significance of terror in order to uphold the dictatorship of the Jacobin's, but ultimately this had a demoralising effect, and the Jacobin regime was overthrown and the rule of the bourgeoisie was established. Kautsky utilises this analysis in order to establish the similarities between Jacobin dictatorship and the rule of the Bolsheviks. In contrast, he wants to outline the differences between the Paris Commune and the October revolution. He argues that the former represents the dynamic of spontaneous events that were not planned or organised. But: “The Bolsheviks acquired power through a well-prepared coup d’état, which in one stroke yielded to them the entire State machinery, which they immediately proceeded to exploit in the most energetic and reckless manner possible, with a view to depriving their opponents of all political and economic power – of all their opponents including the proletariat.”(52) This understanding of the Bolsheviks ascent to power is more critical than in the past. Kautsky makes no attempt to suggest that they represented sections of the working class. Instead their government is defined by its anti-working class character. In this manner it was different to the Paris Commune. This was effectively formed as a defensive measure generated by the German army surrounding Paris, and one of its first measures was to call for elections on the basis of the principle of universal suffrage. The results of the elections led to majority support for the Blanquists and the Proudhonists, who had confused ideas about the aims of the Commune. The followers of Marx were in a tiny minority. Kautsky, in this instance praises the attempt to establish workers supervision of management, but suggests the Commune was confused about the question of socialism.

He contends that the majority of the Commune believed that a new type of society could be realised by the motives of the will regardless of the material conditions, but Marx outlined the importance of connecting socialism to the issue of the level of capitalist development. (53) Kautsky argues that the Marxist approach is: “The working class, therefore is not always, and in all circumstances, mature enough to take over control. It must everywhere go through a period of development, in order to become capable. Furthermore, it cannot choose the moment when it shall come into power. If the working class does not take over control, then it must not simply destroy the means of production which it finds in existence. It must rather seek to carry on what is already existent, to develop it further in accordance with the needs of the proletariat, and to “liberate the elements of the new society”, all which in different circumstances requires very different treatment. It will thus at any given moment more easily find what is attainable the more clearly it understands the actual conditions and takes them into account.”(54) Hence the implication is that the Paris Commune, despite its ideologically confused character, generally upheld this type of approach. It developed a commune state based on universal suffrage, but did not attempt to establish a socialist society based on extensive nationalisation. Marx advised that the aim of the Commune should be to democratically overthrow the bureaucratic state in order to create the possibilities for socialism. In contrast, the Soviet state lacked democratic legitimacy, but embarked on a programme of wholesale nationalisation. The economic situation meant that socialism was not possible in Paris, but the democratic regime raised the social position of the working class. Despite the ideological confusion of the major political participants in the Commune, they still produced a realistic programme that could advance the cause of democracy and socialism. The people of Paris fought tenaciously to maintain the Commune against the opposition of reactionary forces, and the result was that it became an example to be emulated. Kautsky does not suggest that the same criteria can be applied to the October revolution. This regime is not based on an adherence to democracy, and is instead more similar to the regime of terror of the bourgeois revolution. The suggestion is that the struggle for socialism should follow the example of the Commune and not the October revolution.

Trotsky replies to this view in his book also entitled: 'Terrorism and Communism'(55) Trotsky contends that Kautsky criticises the Bolsheviks for their virtues, which was to advocate and then organise the coming to power of the Soviets. In contrast, he has praise for the lack of organisation and confusion of the parties of the Paris Commune. Kautsky does not seem to understand that the very vacillations of the leadership of the Commune resulted in the victory of counter-revolution. The Commune could only have continued to exist if it had taken more serious measures of coercion against the forces of reaction. Hence it lacked a programme of action in order to defend the revolution and to promote its continuation. (56) This seems to be a powerful criticism of Kautsky's rosy view of the Commune, but Trotsky also dismisses the more important point that he makes concerning the fact that the Commune was politically based on the role of democracy and the exercise of the universal suffrage. He also suggests that Marx does not share Kautsky's view that democracy was the most important aspect of the Commune, and instead his major emphasis was on how to extend the authority of the Commune over France. Trotsky has outlined flaws in Kautsky's approach, and outlined reason why Kautsky is not necessarily a faithful supporter of Marx's views on the Commune. But he does not address Kautsky's major point that the Commune corresponded to Marx's understanding of what is possible in relation to recognising the limits of the objective and material conditions. In this context, the Commune understood that it could create the political conditions for socialism, but the situation was still too premature for the realisation of this objective. In this context it advanced the importance of democracy and was also limited in its economic actions. But the Soviet regime does not recognise the limits of the objective situation. Thus instead of trying to promote democracy in order to prepare the basis for transition to socialism in the future, the Bolsheviks represent a minority dictatorship that is attempting to impose socialism by the methods of coercion.(Trotsky is to admit that this is true, and to justify this standpoint)

Kautsky argues that the methods of dictatorship have not advanced the cause of the emancipation of labour. Instead Bolshevik policies are a failure, and the situation is characterised by civil war. The most progressive outcome would be for the Bolsheviks to adopt the methods of democracy in order to accept the objective limits of their policies, and to therefore become more realistic about the process of transition to socialism. He is not optimistic in this regard: “The hereditary sin of Bolshevism has been its suppression of democracy through a form of government, namely, the dictatorship, which has no meaning unless it represents the unlimited and despotic power, either of one single person, or of a small organisation intimately bound together.”(57) The rational course calls for a relaxation of political power in order to reconvene the Constituent Assembly in order to create the political conditions to attract foreign capital for the purposes of economic reconstruction. Only democracy seems to offer the prospect of an end to civil war and to restore the conditions for the promotion of socialism. The alternative is that the dictatorship will be overthrown by an even more reactionary regime.

Trotsky's reply does attempt to establish the most systematic critique of Kautsky's understanding of democracy and its relationship to the transition to socialism. In this manner, he defends the Soviet regime in terms of the reconciliation of democracy and dictatorship. Trotsky outlines in an emphatic manner that the establishment of the political power of the proletariat requires the establishment of dictatorship, or the ability to utilise the state for given policies. These policies are enforced by coercion. This also means repression of the revolts of the reactionary classes. In contrast Kautsky has endorsed a reformist perspective of change by a parliamentary majority, and so rejected the revolutionary struggle of the working class for the dictatorship of the proletariat. He can only sustain his position by implying that the ruling class will not oppose the democratic process of transition. But his approach was truly undermined by the onset of imperialist war and the inadequate response of all the parties of the Second International. Their strategy of the democratic transition to socialism was proved to be totally inadequate, and the only response was the intensification of the class struggle leading to insurrection and revolution.

Trotsky also outlines the view that the approach of Kautsky is based on the vague but reactionary conception of the balance of power. Kautsky implies the Soviet regime is premature because it has violated the 'balance of power', which is defined by the level of the productive forces, the relations between the classes, the role of political parties, and anything else that arbitrarily defines this conception. The ultimate criteria by which the balance of power could be evaluated was by the realisation of a Parliamentary majority for socialism. However, the onset of imperialist war upset all these calculations, the various socialist parties were unable to respond in a revolutionary manner and so indicated that they lagged behind the requirements of the productive forces which could only be realised by world revolution. Consequently, the strategy of an orderly and evolutionary democratic transition to political power of the proletariat had been undermined by the abrupt changes in the political situation, which demanded a decisive revolutionary response. Instead the various socialist parties capitulated to the imperialist nation. This means the effective response of Kautsky is to repeat the dogma about the democratic transition to socialism and to effectively preach confusion: “Such is now the role of Kautsky and his sympathizers. They teach the proletariat not to believe in itself, but to believe in the crooked mirror of democracy which has been shattered by the jackboot of militarism into a thousand fragments. The decisive factor in the revolutionary policy of the working class must be, in their view, not the international situation, not the actual collapse of capitalism, not that social collapse which is generated thereby, not that concrete necessity of the supremacy of the working class for which the cry arises from the smoking ruins of capitalist civilisation – not all that must determine the revolutionary policy of the proletariat – but that counting of votes which is carried out by the capitalist tellers of parliamentarism.”(58)

Trotsky has succeeded in pointing Kautsky on the defensive on his apparently strongest point. He has outlined how the norms of parliamentary democracy no longer correspond to the requirements of class struggle, and instead the outbreak of imperialist war demands a principled strategy of revolution. However, Kautsky attempts to provide an alternative to the criticism of Trotsky. He would argue that he does defend his own version of the strategy of world revolution. He argues that the Bolshevik conception of world revolution, which is based on the realisation of the dictatorship of the communist party, is not an expression of a genuine revolutionary process, but he also has to praise the October revolution for helping to undermine the nationalism generated by the war, and instead for its promotion of proletarian internationalism: “Whatever one may think of the Bolshevik methods, the fact that a proletarian government in a great state has not only come into power, but been able to maintain itself for nearly two years under the most difficult conditions conceivable, naturally increases the feeling of power among the proletariat of all countries. For the world revolution therefore, in this respect, the Bolsheviks have rendered an enormous service, far more than they have through their emissaries and propagandists, who have been responsible for more harm to the proletarian cause than for any revolutionary achievement.”(59) The world revolution has been set in motion, but it will not take the form of corresponding to Bolshevik perspectives. Instead: “It will not proceed on the lines of a dictatorship, nor by means of cannons and guns, nor through the destruction of one's political and social adversaries, but only through democracy and humanity.”(60)

This standpoint is vague, and it does not outline how the intensification of the class struggle, which has accompanied the Russian revolution, can be made compatible with orderly and evolutionary change by means of a majority in Parliament. Kautsky has admitted that the working class has been radicalised by means of war and revolution, and yet he insists that revolutionary change will take an orderly democratic form. He contends that this view is based on the fact that the working class represents the majority of the nation in the advanced capitalist countries, and so change will be correspond to the activity of the democratic process. But this does not mean that he is able to adequately answer Trotsky's point that the intensification of the class struggle generated by imperialist war means that Kautsky’s strategy has become an anachronistic schema. Furthermore, Trotsky develops the argument that the perspective of change via the institutions of bourgeois democracy is problematical and not capable of promoting revolutionary transformation. In this sense he is attempting to tackle issues that are avoided by Lenin concerning the significance of the process of the democratic transition to socialism. If Trotsky can outline how this process is problematical he has improved the argument in favour of the revolutionary process of change adopted by the Soviets.

Trotsky contends that since the onset of imperialist war the institutions of bourgeois democracy have become exhausted and anachronistic. The working class was unprepared for this development because it had been educated by bourgeois democracy to prepare for a smooth and evolutionary process of change. This perspective has been discredited, and instead the options have become revolution or civil war. But, Trotsky contends that even without this development the possibility of the democratic transition to socialism within capitalist society is complicated by the class structure of capitalist society, the importance of the middle class means that it is difficult for the working class to obtain an electoral majority in Parliament. But this possibility is further complicated by the imperialist war, which means that all the parties of Parliament have become discredited and exhausted, and the working class has become radicalised and prepared to oppose the system using militant methods. The class struggle is not expressed in terms of the stagnating dynamics of Parliament: “All the intermediate political groups, including here first and foremost the social patriotic parties, are rotting alive. The proletariat they have deceived is turning against them more and more every day, and is becoming strengthened in their revolutionary convictions as the only power that can save the peoples from savagery and destruction. However, history has not at all secured, just at this moment, a formal parliamentary majority on the side of the party of social revolution. In other words, history has not transformed the nation into a debating society solemnly voting the transition to the social revolution by a majority of votes. On the contrary, the violent revolution has become a necessity precisely because the imminent requirements of history are helpless to find a road through the apparatus of parliamentary democracy.”(61)

Thus Trotsky is honest to suggest that the intensification of the class struggle does not imply the creation of a majority within society in favour of the transition to socialism. Instead possibly only the militant minority of the working class are engaged in action that opposes the domination of capitalism, and this activity cannot easily be translated into a parliamentary majority for socialism. However, instead of vacillating like Kautsky when faced with the complications of this situation, it is necessary to struggle to transform the actions of the militant minority of workers into the basis of the generation of a successful revolutionary process. The task is for the vanguard of the working class to obtain the support of the majority of the working class for the aim of the overthrow of capitalism, but this development cannot be achieved via the role of Parliament. Kautsky has forgotten that at one time the task of the socialist parties was to demonstrate the limitations of democracy in the struggle for socialism. Now, he constructs an ideal democracy that in rigid terms is the only permissible basis for the struggle for socialism: “The theoretical apostasy of Kautsky lies just in this point: having recognised the principle of democracy as absolute and eternal, he has stepped back from materialist dialectics to natural law. That which was exposed by Marxism as the passing mechanism of the bourgeoisie, and was subject only to temporary utilization with the object of preparing the proletarian revolution, has been newly sanctified by Kautsky as the supreme principle standing above classes, and unconditionally subordinating to itself the methods of the proletarian struggle.”(62)

In other words Trotsky is arguing that the political significance of the imperialist war is the intensification of the class struggle, which means the situation does not correspond to the stagnant role of Parliament. It is also necessary to suggest that the institutions of bourgeois democracy have become utterly discredited and instead represent the open dictatorship of finance capital. The working class has a strategic dilemma in this situation; it is unlikely to obtain political power via a majority in Parliament because the class structure and its voting consequences lag behind the dynamics of the class struggle. The militant minority of the working class is in open revolt against capitalism despite the conservative inclinations of the majority of the population. In this context, the only strategic approach is to promote revolution against the continued domination of the institutions of bourgeois democracy. Kautsky is unable to understand this situation because he continues to believe in an ideal democracy that brings about an orderly majority for socialism via the role of the Parliamentary structures. This concept of an ideal democracy is a fiction that contradicts the reality of the actual dynamics of the class struggle. Thus to limit oneself to the conservative restrictions of bourgeois democracy is to undermine the possibility to develop militant action against capitalism, and means rejecting winning the support of the majority of the working class in favour of revolution, and to therefore oppose the attempt to overthrow capitalism.

Kautsky replies that the conditions for transition to socialism are both the economic situation and the ability of democracy to express the level of support for this objective. The result of democratic elections can indicate if political progress is being made towards the prospect of realising socialism. Hence for the Bolsheviks to argue that the class struggle has become violent results from their methods of terror and coercion rather than because of the requirements of the actual situation. It is true that the war led to the influence of the doctrine of militarism and increasing acceptance of the role of violence. The replacement of the skilled workers, who were conscripted, by young workers, meant that the influence of Marxism was replaced by nihilistic doctrines that were based on ideologies of violence. This created a sense of radicalisation that was conducive to the doctrines of the Bolsheviks about instant revolution. The more patient doctrines of Marxism that emphasised the slow evolution of the objective conditions for socialism were discredited. This was not because the situation was maturing for socialism, but instead it was an expression of the influence of these sociological changes within the working class. Traditional Marxism was supplanted by more left-wing doctrines that represented the utopian impulse for imminent world revolution: “For a proletarian it argues a certain amount of resignation on his part to acknowledge a doctrine, which certainly does not expect of him passive waiting, but on the other hand spurs him on to an energetic

continuation of the class struggle; yet which nevertheless makes his ultimate emancipation from conditions dependent on a mode of development, which first of all has to be discovered and created. However difficult it was for the proletarian in the latter decades before the war, his position was such that he could, to a certain extent, live in such a way, that the immediate transformation of society was for him not a question of life or death; at least not for the skilled labourer, who formed the nucleus of the class struggle and Socialist movement. Nowadays these workmen are ousted in all political and economic struggles by the unskilled, and the conditions of the latter are so desperate that they cannot afford to wait.”(63)

This viewpoint is not very empirically tenable given that it is skilled workers who are to the forefront of militant actions throughout Europe, and they are often influenced by Marxist organisations. These workers are not motivated by desperation, and instead have been discontented by the lowering of the standard of living brought about by the war economy. They have articulated militant demands, which do not represent crude desperation, and they have linked these demands to a call for an end to the war. Kautsky has tried to utilise sociology in order to gloss over the significance of the intensification of the class struggle caused by the imperialist war. It is not changes in the composition of the working class that is the major aspect of radicalisation, but instead the mood of militancy is because of the effects of imperialist war and the increasing repression of the state. The very crisis of capitalism has created a militant minority within the working class. But Kautsky utilises his crude sociological approach in order to uphold his democratic conception of the transition to socialism. He argues that the more mature and skilled workers still adhere to the democratic perspective of transition to socialism. What he cannot contemplate is that the intensification of the class struggle has objective causes within the world economic situation. However, these limitations do not gloss over Trotsky's strategic tension. The very inability to obtain a majority in Parliament in favour of proletarian revolution may undermine the development and legitimacy of class struggle. This is a dilemma that revolutionary Marxists have always been confronted with in advanced capitalist countries.

However, it would be unfair to suggest that this above view represents the last word of Kautsky concerning the transition to socialism in the immediate post-war period. He outlines how human history is based on the development of distinct communities which often have had antagonistic relations with each other. But there has also been the development of peaceful relations between groups, classes and nations. Capitalism has historically been based on colonial conquest, and the French revolution was characterised by repression and terror. However, this latter situation was because of the contradictions involved in the Jacobin's trying to maintain the domination of the bourgeoisie whilst also satisfying the aspirations of the masses. The development of capitalism has meant the disorganised masses of the French revolution have been replaced with a sophisticated proletariat with definite aims and objectives. It was accepted that the reign of terror of the French revolution was unacceptable, and that the attempt to transform society could not be based on a minority utilising force. Instead it was necessary to accept that the conditions had to mature that would make change both favourable, and peaceful or democratic. The development of Marxism meant that it was understood that only with the advanced development of capitalism would socialism become possible: “Socialism for the proletariat schooled in Marxist thought thus ceased to be something that could at once be introduced and realised everywhere, and under any conditions. Even where it did obtain political power, it to introduce only so much of socialism as was possible under the existing conditions, and in a form corresponding to those particular conditions. According to this conception, socialism could not be introduced by means of a coup d’état. It was to be the result of a long historical process. At the same time, the socialists were for ever being urged to undertake, at any given moment, only what was possible under the conditions, material and moral, then prevailing. If, therefore, everything was to be done with due consideration, it would have been impossible for the socialists to fail of anything they undertook, or for them to find themselves in a desperate condition, which should force them to act contrary to the spirit of the proletariat and of socialism, and have recourse to terrorism.”(64)

In other words the increasing influence of Marxism within society, and even in the world war period, has enhanced the significance of peace and democracy, and so has undermined the view that civil war is the only principled method to express the demands of class struggle. Hence, Kautsky is arguing that genuine Marxism is defined by its opposition to the tendencies to justify violence and war within society because they do not provide an accurate indicator of the prospect for the introduction of socialism. Hence genuine Marxist's are opposed to those socialists who have become defenders of imperialist war in the name of the national interest, and also those who utilise terror and coercion like the Bolsheviks. Hence peace is the best possible political situation to define whether a society is maturing for socialism. The dislocation of the economy brought about by imperialist war, has presumably undermined the economic premises for socialism. In contrast, the Bolsheviks have accepted an ideology of violence which means that they want to force society to accept socialism regardless of the fact that Russia lacks the material conditions to realise this objective. Instead a condition of peace and democracy implies the most reliable situation to assess whether the country is ready for socialism. However, Kautsky does accept that a Marxist party can come to power in a country not yet maturing for socialism, but he argues that in this situation a party must know its limits and restrictions. It should do what is feasible, but not try to implement socialism in a premature and artificial manner. In this manner, Kautsky provides support for the Mensheviks, but opposes the dictatorship of the Bolsheviks. This perspective is Kautsky's most detailed exposition of a strategy that is opposed to that of the Bolsheviks. It unites a historical materialist analysis with the aims of peace and socialism. In this context he criticises the Bolshevik approach of extra-parliamentary struggle for promoting violence and the possibility of it resulting in a dictatorship of an elite rather than the construction of a genuine democratic socialist regime. The point he is making is that resort to extra-parliamentary methods of struggle, except for limited objectives like strikes, can ultimately only be successful with the application of coercion and the denial of the democratic principles of struggle. In contrast the role of peace and democracy is best able to realise socialism in a manner that is based on the interests and aspirations of the majority of society.

Hence Kautsky is arguing that the principles of democracy are not opposed to the dynamics of the class struggle but instead represent them because it indicates the development of the effective conditions for the transition to socialism. Furthermore, he would suggest that Trotsky is referring to violent and extra-parliamentary struggle that can only result in the premature attempt to realise socialism. This means what he would define as the violation of the laws of historical materialism can only create the rule of an elite on behalf on the working class. This perspective is emphatically refuted by Trotsky who contends that Kautsky's conception of the realisation of socialism is based on a rejection of the revolutionary dynamics of the class struggle: “If the parliamentary regime, even in the period of 'peaceful,' stable development was rather a crude method of discovering the opinion of the country, and in the epoch of the revolutionary storm completely lost its capacity to follow the course of the struggle and the development of revolutionary consciousness, the soviet regime, which is more closely, straightly, honestly bound up with the toiling majority of the people, does achieve meaning, not in statically reflecting a majority, but in dynamically creating it.”(65) The point is that the working class creates real institutions of democracy which express the requirements of the class struggle, and they act to promote the overthrow of the bourgeois state and then represent the organs of the political participation of working people in the organisation of the commune state. In contrast, Kautsky supports the convening of the Constituent Assembly which can only result in allowing the reactionaries to mobilise against Soviet power. Kautsky supports the re-creation of the Constituent Assembly in order to attract foreign capital for Russia. His formulations do not recognise that the immediate issue is support for the Soviets, or adherence to counter-revolution. The call for the Constituent Assembly is only a diversion. Trotsky implies that the rigid conception of historical materialism upheld by Kautsky justifies an abstract understanding of social reality which is unable to grasp the real dynamics of the class struggle. Hence he has an idealist view of democracy that has nothing to do with genuine proletarian democracy and its role in advancing the cause of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and the formation of the Commune state. Kautsky's abstract approach also means that he upholds the Constituent Assembly and refuses to support the real genuine democratic alternative of the role of the Soviets.

Kautsky has a problem because he cannot outline convincingly how his conception of democracy can effectively promote the realisation of socialism. The alternative of the Bolshevik emphasis on the role of working class institutions that can connect democracy with the struggle for political power seems to be a more principled and practical strategy. He also has the political problem that the majority of German Social Democracy no longer support the utilisation of democracy in order to advance the cause of socialism, and instead accommodate to the imperialist state. There is no mass basis for Kautsky's position, and instead the character of working class politics is divided between reformism and revolutionary standpoints. Only when he is able to convince German Social Democracy of the superiority of his perspective will he be able to argue more effectively for his strategy. But this possibility has little chance of success. Hence his perspective of democracy becomes mythical and its relationship to the aim of socialism becomes tenuous. In contrast, the Bolshevik perspective becomes more popular. But Kautsky is still able to argue that the Bolshevik revolution is based on the effective rejection of the premises of historical materialism, that a country with a low level of the productive forces is not mature for socialism. Instead the Bolsheviks exploited the discontent of the masses and carried out the overthrow of the Provisional government. The Bolsheviks were popular with the army because they advocated peace, and with the peasants because they supported land reform. They also obtained support of the working class because of their discontent. But the conditions were not present for the organisation and administration of a socialist economy. The economic system of Russia was not based on a sophisticated division of labour, and the cultural capacity of the working class was limited because of the primitive economic situation: “Moreover, it also demands a proletariat, which is conscious of its duties, not only towards its neighbours and comrades, but also towards society as a whole – a proletariat, moreover, which has become accustomed to voluntary discipline and self-administration through long years of mass organisation, and which, finally is intelligent enough to distinguish the possible from the impossible, and the scientifically educated leader with character from an ignorant demigod without a conscience.”(66) Only with developed conditions, and a mature proletariat, is it possible to unite expropriation of industry with the task of reorganisation. But the Soviet regime has not succeeded in this task, and nationalisation has gone alongside economic dislocation. The working class did not have the discipline or ability to raise the productivity of labour, and the creation of paper money was used to disguise the low level of value of production. This resulted in inflationary pressures. In order to try and resolve this situation of economic dislocation, forms of compulsory labour were introduced for the former bourgeoisie. This situation is justified by the restrictive form of Soviet democracy which denies voting rights to the bourgeoisie, bans parties, and ends the freedom of the press. The result of transforming the doctrine of Marxism, which should be about the emancipation of humanity, into a crude form of class revenge, has only led to the demoralisation of the proletariat. Hence the result has been the resort to methods of coercion, which has been implemented by tribunals, in order to desperately attempt to increase the morale of the working class. This development is to be reinforced by the introduction of hierarchy within production, and the regime of the dictatorship of the single individual, or one man management. It is argued that only with compulsion will it be possible to realise the transition from capitalism to socialism. But this is not the self-exercise of compulsion exercised by the majority of society, and instead it is the compulsion of single individuals imposed onto working people. The result of this situation is arbitrary tyranny and despotism. Kautsky has outlined a convincing conception of the connection between the premature attempt to realise socialism and the implementation of measures of coercion, repression, compulsion and terror. The disorganisation of the economy, and the lack of culture and efficiency of the proletariat, means that elitist and repressive measures are introduced in order to try and raise the level of the productive forces. In this situation the only outcome is a new form of hierarchy in which a state bureaucracy imposes its will on the population.

In his reply, Trotsky does not deny that all revolutions have tended to impose terror. This situation was inevitable in the aftermath of the Russian revolution because of the situation of civil war. A certain level of repression is necessary in order to bring about the capitulation of the opponent and acceptance of the victory of the revolution: “The more ferocious and dangerous is the resistance of the class enemy who have been overthrown, the more inevitably does the system of repression take the form of a system of terror.”(67) Terror is not resorted to for any aimless purpose, instead it is utilised in order to defend the revolutionary regime and oppose the counter-revolutionary actions of the former ruling class. But Kautsky cannot understand this point. However, Trotsky also defends the restrictions on freedom of the press, and the banning of parties like the Mensheviks, in the name of defence of the revolution during the civil war. He does not seem to recognise that this could establish precedents that could ultimately destroy vital political freedoms of the Soviet system. Despite this criticism, Trotsky is making the valid point that in the era of imperialist war, the bourgeoisie has become accustomed to defend its interests in a violent manner. Thus the Soviet state should expect the reaction of counter-revolutionary violence from the bourgeoisie, and therefore act to protect itself with measures of coercion. He contends that Kautsky's view that the bourgeoisie will accept the peaceful transition to socialism is unrealistic: “The experience of the last five years leaves no doubt whatever on this score; if even previously it was absolutely utopian to expect that the 'expropriation' of the propertied classes – thanks to 'democracy' – would take place imperceptibly and painlessly, without insurrections, armed conflicts, attempts at counter-revolution and severe repression, the state of affairs we have inherited from the imperialist war predetermines, doubly and trebly, the tense character of the civil war and dictatorship of the proletariat.”(68)

But it is one thing to indicate the virtual inevitability of violence in the revolutionary process, and something entirely different to justify compulsion against the working class in the name of socialism. This is something that Trotsky still has to justify. He begins his establishment of a critique of Kautsky's position by suggesting that his argument is based on snobbish dismissal of the capacities of the Russian working class in relation to administration and organisation of the economy. Trotsky outlines in vivid detail the willingness of the Russian workers to act in an enthusiastic and disciplined manner in order to carry out the many arduous tasks involved in developing the economy. But this emphasis on the heroism of the Russian workers does not strictly address Kautsky's point that the Russian workers lack the capacity to organise a socialist economy which is created by the process of the creation of a sophisticated and modern capitalist mode of production. Instead in a voluntarist and heroic manner, Trotsky maintains that the Russian workers have learnt by the force of necessity how to organise an economy: “And once having taken over production, the proletariat is obliged, under the pressure of iron necessity, to learn by its own experience a most difficult art – that of organising socialist economy.”(69) But Trotsky knows that this viewpoint is not strictly true. The actual dominating role within the relations of production belongs to the workers state, and the role of specialists and one man management. He also outlines the importance of the Soviets for helping to organise society after the revolution, and so suggests that Kautsky's view of the Soviets is limited and restrictive. Hence the impression he presents is that the working class organised in the Soviets, and administering the economy, is running society. In this sense, it would appeared that Trotsky is able to effectively refute Kautsky who contends that the working class of Russia is too immature to supervise the economy and society, and instead the primary political force must be the dictatorship of the Communist party.

Ironically, Trotsky does not deny the validity of Kautsky's criticism. The conclusion he makes, is that the Communist party is the indispensable expression of the dictatorship of the proletariat: “The exclusive role of the Communist party under the conditions of a victorious proletarian revolution is quite comprehensible. The question is of the dictatorship of the class. In the composition of that class there enter various elements, heterogeneous moods, different levels of development. Yet the dictatorship presupposes unity of will, unity of direction, unity of action. By what other path then can it be attained? The revolutionary supremacy of the proletariat pre-supposes within the proletariat itself the political supremacy of a party, with a clear programme of action and a faultless internal discipline.”(70) Hence, unintentionally, Trotsky seems to confirm Kautsky's view that in a situation which is immature for socialism, the political process must be characterised by the dictatorship of the revolutionary party. Trotsky admits that the party has a level of class consciousness which is superior to that of the working class as a whole, and so has the political virtues to dominate society. He does not even qualify this view by suggesting the role of the party is to assist the working class in the running of society, instead because the party is considered to represent the historic interests of the class it should have a political monopoly of power. The dictatorship of the party is the dictatorship of the proletariat. This justification of substitutionism undermines all that Trotsky has said about the working class organising the economy and society. Instead he accepts that the working class is not mature enough – the position of Kautsky – to be a ruling class without qualification, and instead only the party can express and implement the interests of the proletariat. Thus he admits quite openly that the dictatorship of the soviets can only be exercised because of the role of the party: “It is thanks to the clarity of its theoretical vision and its strong revolutionary organisation that the party has afforded to the soviets the possibility of becoming transformed from shapeless parliaments of labour into the apparatus of the supremacy of labour. In this 'substitution' of the power of the party for the power of the working class there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. The communists express the fundamental interests of the working class.”(71)

This denial of substitutionism is a playing with words. The point is the active element in the political process is the party. The working class cannot act on its own initiative without the permission of the party. Hence the party is more than an organisation which promotes the self-activity of the working class, instead it instructs the class in what is possible. This means it is inconceivable that the trade unions can assert their independence from the party. (Although Lenin did ultimately disagree with this view) Instead the party represents the logic of progressive historical development because it represents the vanguard of the class, and acts to persuade the rest of the class of the correctness of its policies. This viewpoint confirms Kautsky's standpoint that the party represents a dictatorship over the working class. Trotsky considers the proletariat to be a vacillating class that requires the leadership of the party if it is to act in a principled manner. The conclusion of this standpoint is that the party will be the most dynamic element within the organisation of the economy and the Soviets. Hence Trotsky has confirmed Kautsky view that this situation is because the working class is not yet capable of administering society and the economy. Thus Trotsky accepts the view of historical materialism outlined by Kautsky, and utilised this conception in order to justify the dictatorship of the party. The only political basis to overcome this situation is world revolution. In other words, Trotsky upholds the role of the revolutionary bureaucracy until the advent of world revolution. Ironically, only Lenin admits in 1922 the problem is with the party, and its domination of the bureaucratic workers state has to be overcome.

Trotsky indicates that Kautsky's approach represents a sense of complacency that underestimates the seriousness of the economic situation which is caused by the civil war. The only policy that will address the seriousness of the situation is the compulsory organisation of labour. In order to organise labour where it is most needed it is necessary to develop the militarisation of labour under the supervision of the Red Army. The alternative is to allow the allocation of labour to be developed on the basis of the free market, but this will not result in the most efficient utilisation of resources which will become dictated by the imperatives of profit making. Instead: “But obligation, and, consequently, compulsion, are essential conditions in order to bind down the bourgeois anarchy, and to secure socialization of the means of production and labour, and to reconstruct economic life on the basis of a single plan.”(72) The problem is that Trotsky did not seem to consider this compulsory organisation of labour as an emergency measure dictated by the civil war, economic dislocation and the low development of the productive forces. Instead he considered that the activity of the state in regulating the work of labour was the method for the organisation of a socialist economy. He assumed that productivity would be increased in this manner because it was based on the rational methods of the workers state. It was assumed that this process would mean the workers would accept their dictation and regulation by the state, and so would accept that a change from the situation of free labour was a progressive development. In other words the aim of the development of the productive forces, and the creation of the material conditions for socialism, justified the organisation of workers by the state: “The creation of a socialist society means the organization of workers on new foundations, their adaptation to these foundations, and their labour re-education, with one unchanging end of the increase in the productivity of labour. The working class, under the leadership of its vanguard must re-educate itself on the foundations of socialism.”(73)

Trotsky seems unaware that he seems to be justifying the domination of the state over the working class within the emerging relations of production, or based on the compulsory organisation of labour. He does not suggest any attempt to improve the position of the workers within this form of economic regulation. On the contrary he recommends re-education of the workers in order that they accept the tasks to which they have been assigned. Hence they should accept enthusiastically the instructions of the state: “We say directly and openly to the masses that they can save, rebuild and bring to a flourishing condition a socialist country only by means of hard work, unquestioning discipline and exactness in execution on the part of every worker.”(74) He admits the economy cannot be developed against the wishes of the workers, and he accepts that wages will still be an integral part of the system, but their level will be connected to labour performance, such as the role of piece work. But ultimately coercion will be an integral part of the organisation of labour: “Finally, when it rewards some, the labour state cannot but punish others – those who are clearly infringing labour solidarity, undermining the common work, and seriously impairing the socialist renaissance of the country. Repression for the attainment of economic ends is a necessary weapon of the socialist dictatorship.”(75) Indeed, he admits to the necessity of rivalry between workers in order to guarantee their material conditions of existence.

What he seems to be outlining is a new type of exploitative society. In the name of the workers state he seems to be justifying the subordination of the working class within the emerging relations of production in terms of the role of coercion. Furthermore, the workers seem to lack the role of the trade unions as defence mechanisms in order to protect their interests. Instead Trotsky seems to justify a crude identity between the workers and their state which means he cannot conceive that the implementation of methods of compulsion represents the possibility of extracting a surplus in a manner that is not voluntary and accepted by the workforce. The questions raised by compulsion are not easily answered when it is also suggested that the immediate priorities are the requirements of transport and the means of production, whilst the generation of the items of consumption are a long term priority. Trotsky suggests that the working class will voluntarily accept this logic of the proposed economic plan: “The masses, who for a prolonged period will still bear all the weight of labour and of privation, must realize to the full the inevitable internal logic of this economic plan if they are to prove capable of carrying it out.”(76) But the point is the workers have no choice. They have to accept the plan, even if they have had no effective involvement in its inspiration, and effectively the creation of an economy that is based on the priority of arms and the means of production is decided by the slow tempo of the world revolution. The actual material interests of the workers and peasants are a secondary consideration for the planners who impose their proposals without any possibility of them being rejected by the popular voice of the people. Trotsky makes the valid point that the concern is to overcome the situation of economic collapse, but it is worrying that the major aspect of this recovery is not related to raising the morale of the working class via the emphasis on production of consumer goods. Instead in a rigid manner this is the lowest priority of the plan.

This point is connected to the view that what is important is not the exercise of the actual will of the working class, but instead the primacy of the nationalised economy, the plan and its implementation in the form of one man management: “The dictatorship of the proletariat is exercised in the abolition of private property in the means of production, in the supremacy over the whole Soviet mechanism of the collective will of the workers, and not at all in the form in which individual economic enterprises are administered.”(77) Consequently the collective will of the workers is not exercised directly by them, but instead indirectly realised by the alienation of economic power to state institutions like the plan, nationalisation and the compulsory organisation of labour. This process is locally directed by the role of the managers of enterprises. Trotsky accepts Kautsky's view that the Soviet working class is still too inexperienced and unable to administer industry in a collegiate and collective manner. In order to learn experience, it is necessary for the supervision of experts over the working class. Trotsky justifies this hierarchical and coercive method of production by suggesting the worker will not resent the situation because it is the result of the policy of the workers state: “Naturally, it is quite clear that the state must by means of the bone system, give the better workers better conditions of existence. But this not only does not exclude, but on the contrary pre-supposes that the state and the trade unions – without which the Soviet state will not build up industry – acquires new rights of some kind over the worker. The worker does not merely bargain with the Soviet state: no, he is subordinated to the Soviet state, under its orders in every direction – for it is his state.”(78)

In other words it is accepted that the relationship between the workers state and the worker is one of instruction, direction and the supposedly willing acceptance of orders. The workers should accept their subordination to the state because it is their state. Indeed, Trotsky implies that workers will be willing to accept the imperatives of the state because it is their state. He contends that in the transition period to socialism it is unrealistic to maintain that the working class can freely and voluntarily define its own participation in the process of constructing the socialist economy. Instead the workers state will direct the role of labour using methods like compulsion and militarisation. He does not question whether this situation would result in a new form of domination of the state over the activity of labour. Instead he argues: “Our compulsion is applied by a workers and peasants government, in the name of the interests of the labouring masses.”(79) However, if the working class lacks methods that ensure the accountability of this government to their democratic influence then this government becomes distinct and increasingly imposes its own interests. Trotsky outlines impressively the utopian character of the Menshevik perspectives concerning the organisation of labour and the aims of policy. But his alternative to their utopian approach is unable to establish how compulsion can result in anything other than the coercive organisation of labour in an exploitative manner. He argues that this policy is the outcome of the decisions of the workers state, but the problem is that this decision is no longer decided by the effective functioning of Soviet democracy. The working class do not freely decide that compulsion is required. Instead it is the policy advocated by Trotsky, and based on the importance of the Red Army. Kautsky could also argue that this economic situation is because of the lack of mature conditions favouring the transition to socialism.

Kautsky suggests the type of compulsion that has occurred is compatible with the dictatorship of individuals rather than a democratic process of transition to socialism: “Even democracy itself does not exclude a certain type of compulsion; but the only kind of compulsion that is concedes is that of the majority over the minority. The compulsion necessary for the transition from capitalism to socialism is the compulsion of the majority of the workers over the minority of the capitalists; but this is not the case in the second stage of the revolution......Here it is a question of the compulsion exercised by single individuals over the masses of the workers.”(80) This situation has arisen because the apparently immature and inexperienced workers will not be allowed to choose the experts who direct industry and implement the process of compulsion, and instead the party selects those people who are considered most suited to direct the process of production. The problem is that the various experts are not necessarily convinced of the superiority of socialism, and so do not act diligently in order to encourage the development of production. Instead they are provided with high wages, and have increased powers over the enterprise, in order to encourage them to provide more effective administration of industry. The result of this situation is the encouragement of capitalism within industry. In agriculture, the peasants engage in private production, but their surplus is requisitioned by the state, this results in resentment of the towns, whose industries do not provide goods for exchange with agricultural products. In the towns experts have be put in charge of the workers: “This new class gradually appropriated to itself all actual and virtual control, and transformed the freedom of the workers into a mere illusory freedom.”(81) The forms of capitalism are reduced to speculative trade, but the party resides over this situation in terms of the role of a state bureaucracy. The result is widespread economic dislocation, which is promoting a primitive form of state capitalism. Such a development is because of the immaturity of the conditions for socialism, and the centralisation of the state which is ruled by a bureaucracy is in order to preserve the regime. This situation has also led to the formation of a massive Red Army. In this context the primary priority of industry is to serve the army. In this context the advance of world revolution will not overcome the failure of the attempt to create socialism in Russia. Instead of making propaganda for the revolution and its aims in Russia, the central task of socialists should be to indicate how socialism can only be developed with different methods: “The task of European socialism, as against Communism, is quite different, namely, to take care that the moral catastrophe resulting from a particular method of socialism shall not lead to the catastrophe of socialism in general; and further, to endeavour to make a sharp distinction between these methods and the Marxist method, and bring this distinction to the knowledge of the masses.”(82)

Kautsky is providing a powerful argument about how the approach of the Bolsheviks cannot advance the aim of realising socialism in Russia. This is because the conditions for socialism are not yet present, and the actual policies of the Bolshevik are ineffective and counter-productive. The Bolshevik regime has only led to widespread economic dislocation and the collapse of industry. Employing experts to preside over industry had not led to revival because of the basic inefficiency and lack of motivation of these strata. Furthermore, the priority of the Bolsheviks has been upholding the strength of the Red Army which has led to the lack of resources for the production of consumer goods. The modernisation of agriculture has been neglected, and so the result has been the continuation of primitive forms of private capitalism. But agriculture has also been undermined by grain requisition. In an attempt to disguise economic inefficiency methods of compulsion have been introduced. But the extension of the methods of the Red Army into industry cannot be successful. Hence the dictatorship of the state bureaucracy has been formed in order to gloss over the problems involved in developing the productive forces. This situation cannot be conducive to the promotion of socialism, and instead the creation of a crude form of state capitalism has resulted. The advance of socialism cannot occur in this situation because the working class does not organise and administer the economy, and the war economy has its own priorities of survival that do not generate the creation of the material conditions for a post-capitalist society.

This analysis has merit, but it does underestimate the effect of civil war and the economic collapse inherited from the period imperialist war. It is also necessary to question the view that state capitalism has developed. This implies an automatic economic process, in correspondence with the situation of the low level of development of the productive forces, has been able to overcome the consciousness of the participants in the revolutionary process. The utilisation of experts within industry, and the private character of agriculture, does not prove that capitalism has been restored. Instead it would be more perceptive to suggest that the workers state has become bureaucratised because of the pressures of the unfavourable situation. Indeed, this definition would correspond more closely with the ideology of Lenin and Trotsky. In contrast, the concept of state capitalism would imply that this situation had developed despite the objectives of the Bolsheviks to construct socialism. However, Kautsky is making a strong point when he suggests that terror and repression cannot have a progressive role in the development of a new society. Retrogressive methods do not justify pristine ends, and in this manner repression has been utilised in order to uphold a bureaucratic regime: “At the beginning of their regime they declared it to be their object to smash the bureaucratic apparatus, which represented the means of power of the old state; but they have introduced in its place a new form of bureaucratic rule.”(83) But, whilst making valid points about the development of a state bureaucracy in Russia, Kautsky is being dogmatic when he implies that making concessions to foreign capital is identical to ending the possibility of socialism and communism in Russia. But his conclusion has more merits when he indicates: “The hereditary sin of Bolshevism has been its suppression of democracy through a form of government, namely, the dictatorship, which has no meaning unless it represents the unlimited and despotic power, either of one single person, or a small organisation intimately bound together.”(84)

But what is the alternative of Kautsky to the policy of a bureaucratic regime? How does he uphold the principles of democracy and socialism in the concrete conditions of Russia? He calls for the restoration of the freedom of the press and the convening of the Constituent Assembly, and suggests that such measures would restore the moral influence of the Bolsheviks. Certainly, the freedom of the press, and the end to the banning of parties would be welcome. But it is unrealistic to call for the convoking of the Constituent Assembly during conditions of civil war. This institution is a symbol of counter-revolution, and therefore still represents a direct challenge to the legitimacy and authority of the Soviet regime. Hence this demand is unrealistic. Kautsky also calls for an end to civil war, which presumably implies the implementation of a truce. We can agree with his moral horror about war, but the question of how to bring about its end without the undermining of the political and military influence of the Soviet regime, is not addressed. Instead of precise answers to practical questions Kautsky argues that the options are at the level of principles: “As we have only the two alternatives – democracy or civil war – I myself drew the conclusion that whenever socialism does not appear to be possible on a democratic basis, and where the majority of the population rejects it, its time has not yet fully come. Bolshevism, on the other hand, argues that socialism can be introduced by being forced on a majority by a minority, and that such can happen only through dictatorship and civil war.”(85) He argues that the Bolshevik dissolution of the Constituent Assembly increased opposition to its regime, and led to the regime of terror. Only the restoration of the Constituent Assembly can end the civil war: “And yet that alone offers any prospect of bringing the civil war to an end, and of leading Russia again along paths of economic progress and prosperous development towards some form of higher development.”(86)The problem that he does not seem to recognise is that the supporters of the Constituent Assembly are also in favour of the overthrow of the Soviet regime. Thus the possibility of compromise is remote. Instead the antagonism of the rival social forces means that civil war has become unavoidable. This means that Kautsky's attempt to promote the reconstitution of the Constituent Assembly is unrealistic unless there is a victory of the counter-revolution. But it also necessary to suggest that the reactionary forces involved are more likely to establish a military dictatorship. Kautsky would be more constructive and realistic to suggest how the Soviet regime could improve its economy and advance democracy without emphasising the importance of the Constituent Assembly. Trotsky also suggests that elections for a new Constituent Assembly could only take place in the areas of Soviet territory, and this would imply the election of members of the assembly who supported the war effort of the reactionary forces. This would be an intolerable situation. The Constituent Assembly can only be a step forward towards the restoration of capitalism, but in contrast the role of the Soviets is to advance the task of the construction of socialism. (87)

Trotsky seems to be making a valid point. The extent of the antagonisms of Russian society undermines any possibility that re-convening the Constituent Assembly would end the civil war. Instead this perspective represents a naïve view of the political situation in Russia. Kautsky seems to ignore the fact that the reactionary forces do not fight for the Constituent Assembly, but instead are for the most repressive dictatorship of capital. Hence the major progressive economic task is to end war communism, and politically what is also required is an improvement of Soviet democracy. This perspective is not advanced by dogmatically defining Russia as capitalist. Such a view implies that nothing can be done to improve the situation in Soviet Russia. Trotsky defends the class struggle methods of grain requisitions. (88) He does not recognise that these repressive methods concerning the collection of food could only alienate the peasantry from the aims of the Soviet state. Instead he is acting on the basis of an illusion to believe that the aim of socialism is advanced through these coercive methods. But, Kautsky is also caricaturing the aims of the Bolsheviks when he suggests that they want to establish a world dictatorship of Communist parties via the methods of civil war.(89) Kautsky is right to outline how the bourgeoisie of the West is more sophisticated than that of Russia and so is able to hold onto power more tenaciously. His view that the methods of the Bolsheviks can only undermine the development of world revolution, which requires the role of democracy, is more controversial. His contention that the majority of the working class in the West will not support the Bolsheviks because of their attachment to democracy is more considered.

But Kautsky utilises his standpoint in an opportunist manner in order to blame the small forces of the Communists in Germany for divisions within Social Democracy. He does not recognise that the major cause of the splits within the working class is the role of the right wing who defend counter-revolution against the prospect of revolutionary change. He does criticise Noske, the leader of right-wing Social Democracy for establishing a repressive regime, but ultimately blames this situation on the subversive role of the Communists. He rejects any suggestion that the workers councils should establish political power, and instead calls for the realisation of political stability via the role of the National Assembly. Hence he effectively utilises his conception of democracy in order to oppose the dynamics of class struggle, and so can only envisage the realisation of socialism after the establishment of stability and an end to the situation of polarisation: “Democracy alone offers the one means of avoiding despotism, and of coming to some calm and positive construction. But at the present moment democracy has been overpowered theoretically by the Left, and practically by the right wing of the socialist party.....The one and only institution at the present moment that might to some extent keep the empire together can come, not through the Workmen Councils, nor through a dictatorial government, but only through a National Assembly, consisting of representatives of all parts of the empire.”(90) He argues that the workers councils can never express a higher level of democratic authority than a reformed National Assembly. Therefore the Bolshevik's view that Parliamentary institutions can only represent the domination of the bourgeoisie is pessimistic. It is wrong to consider that the bourgeoisie can utilise its control of the press and ideological influences in order to ensure a permanent majority in Parliament: “But if the capitalists are really in a position to buy off the workers in this manner, especially after a revolution like the present, they should be just as capable of influencing those who have the right of voting for these Workmen's Councils. The further assertion that, for the Socialist, even by complete secret ballot, and even with a majority of wage earners in the population, it is impossible to gain a majority in any parliament, on account of the financial power which the capitalists exercise over the proletariat, is equivalent to calling the proletariat nothing but a feeble and cowardly band of illiterates, and simply announces the bankruptcy of the proletarian cause. For if the proletariat were of such poor and wretched constitution, then no institution in the world can help it, however elaborately it might be decked out to ensure victory in spite of its moral and intellectual impotence.”(91)

But this is not the major criticism made by Bolsheviks about the role of Parliament. Instead Trotsky has made it apparent that the stagnant institutions of Parliament do not correspond to the dynamics of the class struggle. This is precisely why the workers establish their own institutions in order to express their distinctive conception of democracy and assert their economic power. These democratic organs become the basis to promote the revolutionary seizure of power by the working class. The institutions of Parliament are not capable of expressing this potential. Indeed, Kautsky has criticism of the present National Assembly for its restrictive and bourgeois character, but his answer is to call for a new type of National Assembly rather than to advocate the revolutionary seizure of power by the Worker's Councils. He defines a struggle for the realisation of the political power of the Workers Councils as a struggle against democracy, and instead he wants to establish a mythical National Assembly based on a truly representative franchise and universal suffrage, and which will result in a majority for the proletariat. In other words, instead of developing a strategy based on reality as it is, which is the opposition of a reactionary National Assembly to the authority of the Workers Councils, he instead invents a fictional National Assembly and in an idealist manner indicates how proletarian power corresponds to the essence of this mythical institution. However, he also suggests that the programme of this fictional Assembly would be the democratisation of society rather than the promotion of class struggle in order to advance the aim of the realisation of socialism.

But, he also promises that democracy in the long-term is a more certain guarantee of socialism than the methods of dictatorship. The strategic problem is that he has not connected his immediate programme of democratisation with the aim of socialism. Instead socialism is relegated to a promise that will ultimately be realised: “Democracy, with its universal equal suffrage, is the method to transform the class struggle out of a hand-to-hand fight into a battle of intelligence, in which one particular class can triumph only if it is intellectually and morally on a level with its opponent. Democracy is the one and only method through which the higher form of life can be realised, and which socialism declares is the right of civilised men.”(92) But instead of this vague promise, Bolshevism promoted a strategy for the political power of the working class based on the formation of Soviets, and intransigent opposition to capitalism. The ambiguity of Kautsky's perspective is replaced with a definite aspiration to promote the seizure of power by the working class. Furthermore, the role of democracy is defined by the revolutionary capacity of Soviet organs. Instead Kautsky ultimately seems to defend an ideal conception of the class struggle, which seems to have little in common with the polarisation and antagonism of reality. Hence Kautsky seems to be having a strategic crisis that means his approach is based on illusions. The result is his centrist vacillation between reformism and revolution. He blames the Communists for undermining the possibility of democratic struggle against the capitalist system, and yet he is still optimistic that this development can occur. Consequently, his standpoint does not recognise that the only progressive development is for his Independent Social Democrats to join with the Communists. Instead his anti-Communist stance means that he eventually rejoins the right wing Social Democrats. This tactical stance does nothing to connect democracy and socialism, and instead means that the Weimar republic is defended by a section of the working class in a reformist manner. His conception of the relationship of democracy to socialism is unable to outline progressive forms of tactics that would actually promote his aim. Instead his tactical disorientation results in supporting bourgeois democracy against the possibility of advancing the proletarian ascent to power.

Trotsky argues that Kautsky has been disorientated since the question of the voting of war credits became a crucial issue in 1914. The result was a right-wing trajectory that led to opposition to the October revolution. He glosses over the role of counter-revolution and instead outlines the supposed limitations of the Soviet regime. He cannot praise the role of the Red Army, but whilst he repudiates Bolshevism he does not outline a coherent alternative. The followers of Kautsky reject the importance of the class struggle, and the cause of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism requires an open split with them. Instead of opportunism: “What the Third International demands of its supporters is a recognition, not in words, but in deeds, that civilised humanity has entered a revolutionary epoch; that all the capitalist countries are speeding towards colossal disturbances and an open civil war; and that the tasks of the revolutionary representatives of the proletariat is to prepare for that inevitable and approaching war the necessary spiritual armoury and buttress of organisation.”(93) Trotsky is adamant that instead of the confusion proposed by Kautsky, because of his disorientation since 1914, it is necessary to uphold a principled revolutionary strategy of the struggle for Soviet power and world revolution. The only alternative being proposed by Kautsky is conciliation of the right wing of Social Democracy. This view is correct, but it is premature to suggest the logical tactic is to split with Kautsky. This is because Kautsky has many followers, and still has enormous prestige. Hence the struggle with centrist Kautskyism should occur within Communist parties in terms of a unification of the Independents with the Communist party. Kautsky may reject such an option, but this development will mean that he is shown to be the splitter. The unification of the Independent and the Communist party will create a mass Communist party. Instead only a small section joined the Communists.

CONCLUSION

The sectarianism of the Communists meant they were never able to effectively tackle the influence of Social Democracy within Germany. This meant tragedy ultimately resulted. Ironically the outcome for both Kautsky and the Communists was tragic. Ultimately both had an interest in maintaining democracy against the forces of reaction. The imposition of dictatorship indicated that Kautsky was right. Only the struggle for democracy can ensure that the realisation of socialism is successful. In a sense, Kautsky was right to suggest that the methods of Bolshevism would not translate smoothly to the countries with long traditions of democracy. It was necessary to develop a strategy of change from the progress of democracy to the generation of socialism that did not rely on the importance of the imposition of dictatorship. In this sense Kautsky possibly had a credible strategy for the transformation of advanced capitalist societies. But it was found wanting when contrasted with the revolutionary approach of the Bolsheviks, which was based on the role of the realisation of the power of the Soviets. Kautsky did not seem to understand the dynamics of the class struggle after the advent of imperialist war. However, his historical materialist approach was able to make powerful criticisms of the Bolsheviks organisation of the Soviet economy. He outlined the limitations of methods of coercion and compulsion, and suggested this situation had arisen because society was not prepared for transition to socialism. But he was naïve to insist that the convening of the Constituent Assembly could solve the issue of the democratic evolution of Russian society. He did not seem to recognise that the civil war meant the question of the Constituent Assembly had become irrelevant, and instead the primary issue had become the maintaining of Soviet power or the victory of reaction. Nevertheless, he was able to outline powerful arguments as to why the dictatorship of the party could not realise socialism because of its elitist and anti-democratic character. The genuine role of democracy, such as a multi-party system, universal suffrage, and freedom of the press, were an indispensable part of any principled revolutionary regime aiming to realise socialism. He also criticised war communism, but in an eccentric manner which suggested a dictatorship of the peasants was being developed. The view that state capitalism was being promoted was not outlined in a convincing manner. Instead it would have been more appropriate to limit this view and suggest a bureaucratic dictatorship over the working class was being created.

In contrast, the strong point of Lenin and Trotsky's approach was that the situation required the advocacy of a principled revolutionary strategy and the perspective of international revolution. They also implied that Kautsky's view that democracy created the conditions for socialism was vague and not precise enough to represent a convincing strategy. Trotsky also outlined the difficulties of transforming the functions of the institutions of bourgeois democracy into an expression of the revolutionary power of the working class. But they were not able to answer Kautsky's point that the methods of dictatorship could not advance the goal of socialism. Trotsky tried to suggest that methods of compulsion were progressive in relation to the organisation of labour, because it was carried out by the workers state. But he only succeeded in justifying the view that it was necessary to subordinate the working class within the emerging relations of production. Lenin was careful not to make this type of defence of the Soviet regime, but he defended the view that it was principled to restrict the franchise. He argued that the requirements of Soviet democracy implied the role of coercion. Thus Kautsky's view that an elite dictatorship was being created seemed to be upheld by the very views of Lenin and Trotsky. However, Kautsky never recognised the significance of the civil war for distorting Bolshevik policies, and he ultimately admitted the October revolution had been an inspiration for the international working class.

Thus, it could be argued that a synthesis of Kautsky, Lenin and Trotsky, would create a principled Marxism. It would mean that the confusion about what constituted revolutionary strategy would be overcome. Instead the aim would be to obtain a majority in the German National Assembly and also establish the dominant influence of the workers councils. The revolutionary regime would not resort to the banning of parties, and more attention would be made to the task of avoiding civil war. The democratic involvement of the working class in the construction of socialism would mean that methods of compulsion are rejected, and instead the workers would elect expert supervisors. Measures to involve the peasants in the process of developing socialism would also replace coercion. However, Kautsky's defeatist view that all that is possible in less advanced countries is capitalism would be rejected. But some of his advice about developing and not restricting democracy would be accepted. Ultimately, the perspective of world revolution would still be upheld in an intransigent manner.

FOOTNOTES:

(1)Vladimir Lenin: Left-wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder, in Collected Works Volume 31, Progress Publishers, Moscow p17-118

(2)John Strachey: Contemporary Capitalism, Victor Gollancz, London 1959

(3)Karl Kautsky: The Dictatorship of the Proletariat Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, 1964 p1-4

(4) ibid p5

(5) ibid p9

(6) ibid p11

(7)Vladimir Lenin: Proletarian Revolution and Renegade Kautsky, in Collected Works volume 28, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1964 p276

(8) ibid p271

(9)Kautsky op cit p19-20

(10)Lenin op cit p263

(11)Kautsky op cit p23

(12)Lenin op cit p294

(13)Kautsky op cit p29

(14)Lenin op cit p303-304

(15)Kautsky op cit p32-33

(16)Lenin op cit p250

(17) ibid p254

(18)Kautsky op cit p33

(19) ibid p40-41

(20)Lenin op cit p249

(21) ibid p260

(22Kautsky op cit p42

(23) ibid p43

(24) ibid p44

(25)Lenin op cit p246

(26)Lenin op cit p303

(27)Kautsky op cit p46

(28)Lenin op cit p298

(29)Kautsky op cit p48

(30)Lenin op cit p305

(31)Kautsky op cit p52-58

(32) ibid p56

(33)Lenin op cit p290

(34)Kautsky op cit p63

(35)Lenin op cit p293

(36) ibid p268

(37) ibid p271

(38)Kautsky op cit p74

(39)Lenin op cit p260

(40) ibid p262

(41)Ibid p263

(42)Kautsky op cit p85

(43)Lenin op cit p254

(44) ibid p279

(45)Kautsky op cit p96

(46) ibid p120

(47)Lenin op cit p304-305

(48)Kautsky op cit p122

(49) ibid p134

(50) ibid p148

(51)Karl Kautsky: Terrorism and Communism, Hyperion Press, Connecticut, 1973

(52) ibid p56

(53) ibid p90-94

(54) ibid p95-96

(55)Leon Trotsky: Terrorism and Communism: New Park, London 1975

(56) ibid p97-102

(57)Kautsky:1973 p217

(58)Trotsky op cit p43

(59)Kautsky 1973 p232-233

(60) ibid p233-234

(61)Trotsky op cit p57-58

(62) ibid p63

(63)Kautsky, 1973 op cit p155

(64) ibid p145

(65)Trotsky op cit p66

(66)Kautsky, 1973 op cit p164-165

(67)Trotsky op cit p75

(68) ibid p86

(69) ibid p117

(70) ibid p122

(71) ibid p123

(72)Ibid p151

(73) ibid p156-157

(74) ibid p157

(75) ibid p159

(76) ibid p167

(77) ibid p170

(78) ibid p176

(79) ibid p178

(80)Kautsky 1973 op cit p185

(81) ibid p200-201

(82) ibid p207

(83) ibid p215

(84) ibid p217

(85) ibid p220

(86) ibid p221

(87)Trotsky op cit p65-68

(88) ibid p125-129

(89)Kautsky 1973 op cit p222

(90) ibid p228

(91) ibid p229-230

(92) ibid p231

(93)Trotsky op cit p195