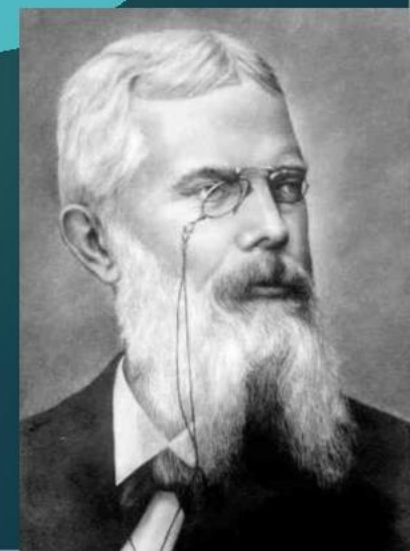
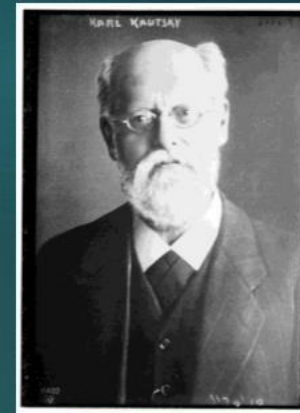




The Erfurt Programme and its Afterlives

BEN LEWIS; MARXISM TRANSLATED



Outline



1. Historical and Theoretical Background in 1891
2. The Programme: Theoretical Section
3. The Programme: Practical Section
4. The Significance of Erfurt
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6. The Erfurt Programme, Kautsky and Lenin
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Background (1891)

- ▶ Not be confused with Die Linke's programme from 2011! Known/seen almost exclusively through a negative lens (Engels's critique, Lenin's later critique in *State and Revolution* echoing Engels)
- ▶ Changed situation for the Socialist Party of Germany, requiring new organisational statutes and a new programme, replacing the old Gotha Programme
- ▶ The product of a long period of discussion and digestion in the party press, most of which has been ignored by historians (party press, resolutions to the congress), but we do now have the various drafts.
- ▶ To wit: Party leadership (June), Engels's Critique (end of June), Leadership Official Draft (July); DNZ's draft (August), the 'Bebelised' version of DNZ, the programme itself
- ▶ Programme not to be a list of 'issues of the day' but to sketch out the transition from capitalism to socialism
- ▶ Became a model to be emulated: Hainfeld Programme (more on that below) and crucially Programme of Russian Social Democracy
- ▶ Kautsky's commentary on it, 'Das Erfurter Programm in seinem grundsatzlichen Teil erlăutert' remains only in abridged translation in English as 'The Class Struggle'
- ▶ Lars Lih and misleading 'Minimum programme' term – translation issue, e.g. 'Das *Mindest*programm der Franzoesischen Arbeiterpartei' (Bernstein (ed.) *Documente des Sozialismus* (1902). German language is slightly less lazy than English. But then 'Minimalforderungen' in, say, Lenin's 1917 piece on the revision of the party programme.
- ▶ But a key strategic pillar of the Marxist programme for society: the culmination of the political demands outlined in the SPD's Erfurt 'minimum' programme.
- ▶ Marx/Engels: 'If one thing is certain, it is that our party and the working class can only come to power under the form of a democratic republic.' This 'democratic republic' was synonymous with 'the form for the dictatorship of the proletariat', he declared, or, as Marx put it, the 'political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour'; the 'last state form of bourgeois society', in which "the class struggle will be fought out to the end".



The Programme

Two Sections: 1. Theoretical

This social transformation amounts to the emancipation not only of the proletariat, but of the entire human race, which is suffering from current conditions. But it can only be the work of the working class, because all other classes, notwithstanding the conflicts of interest between them, stand on the ground of the private ownership of the means of production and have as their common goal the preservation of the foundations of contemporary society.

The struggle of the working class against capitalist exploitation is necessarily a political struggle. Without political rights, the working class cannot carry on its economic struggles and develop its economic organization. It cannot bring about the transfer of the means of production into the possession of the community without first having obtained political power. It is the task of the Social Democratic Party to shape the struggle of the working class into a conscious and unified one and to point out the inherent necessity of its goals.

The German Social Democratic Party therefore does not fight for new class privileges and class rights, but for the abolition of class rule and of classes themselves, for equal rights and equal obligations for all, without distinction of sex or birth. Starting from these views, it fights not only the exploitation and oppression of wage earners in society today, but every manner of exploitation and oppression, whether directed against a class, party, sex, or race.

2. The Practical Section

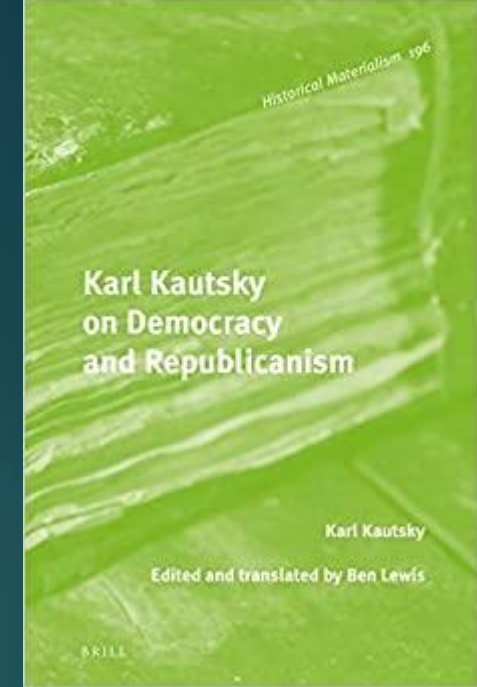
Proceeding from these principles, the German Social Democratic Party demands, first of all:

1. **Universal, equal, and direct suffrage with secret ballot in all elections**, for all citizens of the Reich over the age of twenty, **without distinction of sex**.
2. Direct legislation by the people through the rights of proposal and rejection. Self-determination and self-government of the people in Reich, state, province, and municipality. Election by the people of magistrates, who are answerable and liable to them. Annual voting of taxes.
3. **Education of all to bear arms. Militia in the place of the standing army.**
4. Abolition of all laws that **place women at a disadvantage compared with men** in matters of public or private law.
5. Abolition of all laws that limit or suppress the **free expression of opinion** and restrict or suppress the right of association and assembly. Declaration that religion is a private matter.
6. **Secularization of schools. Compulsory school attendance.**
7. Free administration of justice and free legal assistance. **Administration of the law by judges elected by the people.** Abolition of capital punishment.
8. Free medical care, including midwifery and medicines. Free burial.
9. Graduated income and property tax for defraying all public expenditures, to the extent that they are to be paid for by taxation. Inheritance tax, graduated according to the size of the inheritance and the degree of kinship. **Abolition of all indirect taxes, customs, and other economic measures** that sacrifice the interests of the community to those of a privileged few.

For the protection of the working classes, the German Social Democratic Party demands,

Significance (1891)

- ▶ Builds on the Parti Ouvrier programme (1880) and the Hainfeld Programme (1889)
- ▶ Kautsky's commentary on it, 'Das Erfurter Programm in seinem grundsatzlichen Teil erlaeutert' remains only in abridged translation in English as 'The Class Struggle'
- ▶ Minimum demands: not minimal, partial or short-term
- ▶ Lars Lih and misleading 'Minimum programme' term – translation issue, e.g. 'Das Mindestprogramm der Franzoesischen Arbeiterpartei' (Bernstein (ed.) *Documente des Sozialismus* (1902). German language is slightly less lazy than English. But then 'Minimalforderungen' in, say, Lenin's 1917 piece on the revision of the party programme.
- ▶ A key strategic pillar of the Marxist programme for society: in Luxemburg's case, the culmination of the political demands outlined in the SPD's Erfurt 'minimum' programme: not passive 'attentism'
- ▶ Marx/Engels: 'If one thing is certain, it is that our party and the working class can only come to power under the form of a democratic republic.' This 'democratic republic' was synonymous with 'the form for the dictatorship of the proletariat', he declared, or, as Marx put it, the 'political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour'; the 'last state form of bourgeois society', in which "the class struggle will be fought out to the end".
- ▶ Engels's Critique in a letter to Kautsky, published 10 years later, in 1901, by Kautsky in *Die Neue Zeit*: usually cited as evidence of Engels's disdain for social democracy, but much more complicated (see drafts: he is addressing the 'first' draft). This becomes important later



The Merger Formula and Hainfeld

Consciousness and the Merger of socialism and the workers' Movement

Socialist consciousness as 'etwas von Aussen hineingetragendes', a phrase coined by Kautsky in the (untranslated) article that I am now working on: 'The Revision of the Programme of Social Democracy in Austria' (1902).

Commission established for a revision in 1899: 'aesthetic' considerations, but same structure as the Hainfeld Programme of 1889. Including other resolutions on the national question and the agrarian question

Kautsky's comments on this make their way into Lenin's 'What is to be Done?' Cause of much controversy since: for anarchists, syndicalists, some Cold War Warriors and even Tony Cliff it amounts to evidence of the elitist/'anti-worker' stance of Marxism, which demands so-called vanguard parties so that it can control the working class like a puppet etc

The significance of the theoretical section: distinguishes us from the bourgeois parties, outlines the 'final goal' and the reasons why we aim for it. Does not have the significance of the religious peasant's candle, but achieves the unity of the proletarian movement: avoids unnecessary frictions in a growing movement, and prevents us from becoming overly influenced by the events of the day: enthused and overexcited one day, only to fall into despair a few days later.



1910: Luxemburg returns to Engels

Kautsky says that he has dealt with the question of the republic elsewhere, but my memory fails me! (See my book!)

‘Until now we have done bugger all for the supposedly ‘self-evident’ cause of republicanism ... If the slogan of the republic had been prioritised on all appropriate occasions, then systematic agitation would have sharpened the broadest party circles’ understanding that a Social Democrat is simultaneously a republican as a matter of principle. Then it would either have been impossible for such a flagrant self-humiliation like that in Baden to have occurred, or it would have had to cause a storm of indignation in the Baden camp. But for decades we have completely neglected republican agitation’. (‘The Struggle against Relics’)

‘But as far as Marx was concerned, in his criticism of the Gotha Program he went as far to claim that if it was not possible to declare openly the republic as the chief demand of the political program, then we must omit the other individual democratic demands in that program.’

Officials on a working wage is something that Luxemburg, like Engels, overlooks



Kautsky and Lenin

1905: "We are republicans for the very reason that the democratic republic is the only political form which corresponds to socialism. The monarchy can only exist on the basis of class differences and antagonisms. The abolition of classes also requires the abolition of the monarchy."

But 1910, weasel words, as Luxemburg makes clear: "It is true that our programme does not explicitly mention the republic. But there is no doubt that one cannot be a good social democrat if one is not a good republican. **We can have different opinions about the most appropriate way to express our republican point of view.** But precisely because republican propaganda encounters so many obstacles in Germany, we must all the more carefully avoid anything that might awaken in the masses the belief that we have abandoned our republican convictions or even that we expect the monarchy to promote proletarian aims". **This involves a demonstrable falsification.**

Lenin in *State and Revolution* then makes the claim, an influential one to this day, that Kautsky and the SPD etc did not develop a theory of the state/working-class power. (Similar mistake to Luxemburg: but see Luxemburg v. Lenin in 1919).

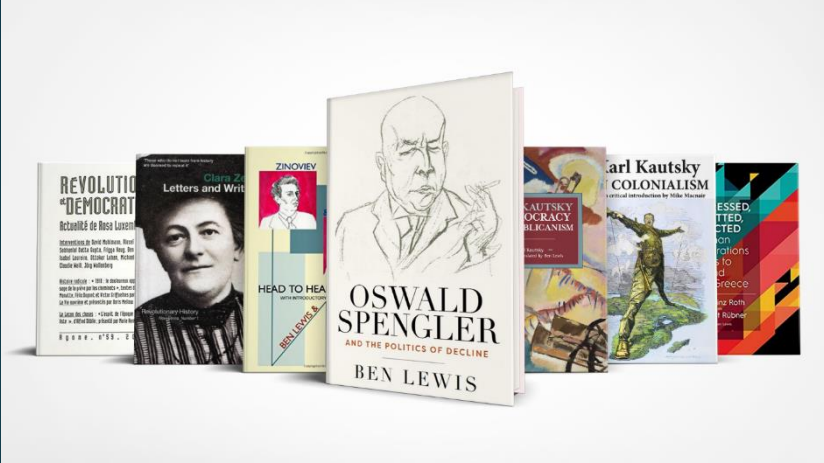
Karl Kautsky (1927): 'Today I am of the view that in class society as in classless society, social development is in the last instance caused not by the class struggle, but by technological progress'.

The Erfurt Programme and History

- ▶ Largely maligned and misunderstood, but background, motives and debates surrounding it are crucial to our own revolutionary history and politics today
- ▶ Seen mainly through a negative lens, for the reasons that we have seen
- ▶ Stalin's 'Short Course': no mention at all. *Quelle surprise* given his creation of a gulf between Bolshevism and the Second International
- ▶ GDR historiography – programme had its place in the period of 'peaceful capitalist development' (sic!) but not in the era of imperialism (this is a common Trotskyist criticism too).
- ▶ Cold War SPD historians view the programme as a negative example insofar as the dilemma they identify in politics between 'principles and making a difference' is informed largely by the former and so apparently leads to 'attentism' and apparent tension/contradiction between the two sections

Summary

- ▶ Largely understudied and therefore misunderstood, but background, motives and debates surrounding it are crucial to our own history and politics today
- ▶ After all, we have seen just how several of the heroes, heroines and
- ▶ Teleological 'reading backwards' narratives to various 'original sins' (the omission of the republic or the DOTP etc). Belies the dynamic development of the SPD itself and the gradual move away from its revolutionary programme with even demands such as the abolition of the standing army/the republic becoming more 'maximum' demands, 'a distant guiding star', as Luxemburg put it.
- ▶ Minimum Programme was the 'common sense' of revolutionary social democracy (Erfurt, Hainfeld, Brussels etc) but this broke apart during the German Revolution (Luxemburg and Bukharin)
- ▶ Since then, the question has gone in all sorts of directions, as we saw above in terms of the many 'afterlives' of the Erfurt Programme in the context of the Cold War. Discovering just what this 'common sense' consisted of is in my view crucial to making Marxism common sense in the workers' movement and beyond today



MARXISM Translated



Ben Lewis, '[Karl Kautsky: from Erfurt to Charlottenburg](#)', *Weekly Worker* 889

Ben Lewis, '[Rosa and the Republic](#)', *Weekly Worker* 981

Ben Lewis (ed.), [Karl Kautsky on Democracy and Republicanism](#) (Leiden: 2019).

Further reading/Info

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